MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

# Between the Lines™

YOUR 2024 MICHIGAN PRIDE CALENDAR

**PRIDE INTERVIEWS**

Small-town to big-time headliner Wreckno

Masked country stud Orville Peck

Groundbreaking Detroit artist Tiff Massey

## MARCHING TO THE BEAT OF HER OWN DRUM

HOW LOVE GUIDES THE MUSIC OF FERNDALE PRIDE HEADLINER DJ HOLOGRAPHIC

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Courtesy photo

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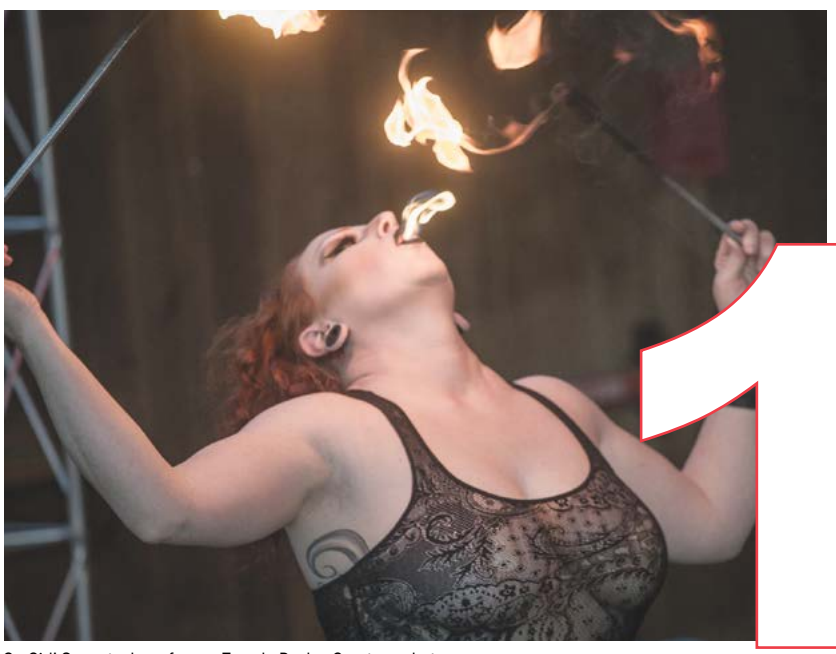
# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

**BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT**

Happy Pride, gays! The first festivals of the season will kick off June 1, from reliably lively Ferndale Pride to smaller fests in Ortonville, Lowell and Saugatuck/Douglas — there's plenty of Pride to keep every queer Michigander busy. But wait… yep, there's more. The annual Go Girl! Saugatuck women's weekend is set for May 31-June 2 and you'll find a unique queer square dance event on the horizon, too. While you're at it, fill up your calendar with a unique queer artist exhibit in Ypsilanti and Sing Out Detroit's latest concert.

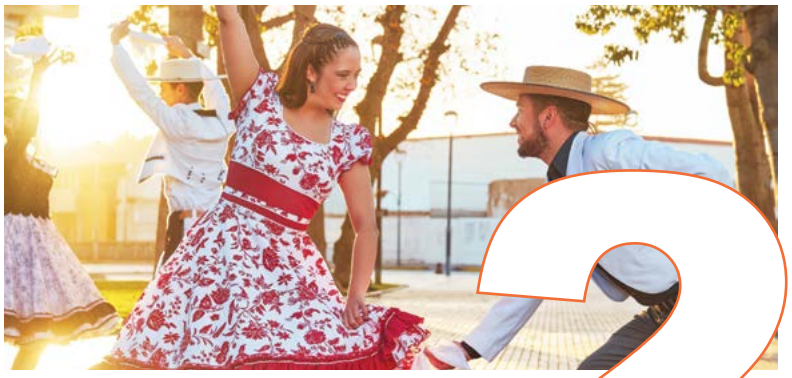


Go Girl! Saugatuck performer Tamale Rocks. Courtesy photo

## 1 Attend the Go Girl! Saugatuck Women's Weekend

The annual Go Girl! Saugatuck festival, set for May 31 to June 2, will be held in a new location this year (The Dunes Resort in Douglas), but the spirit of this popular queer- and trans-inclusive women's event remains true. Go Girl! comedy performer Tamale Sepp (aka Tamale Rocks) told BTL earlier this year that the festival "is an intersectional, intergenerational good time," adding, "I would invite people to come for a day or the whole weekend, but come and enjoy the performances, the DJs, the workshops, the pool parties. Come with an open mind and be prepared to have some fun."

*May 31-June 2, The Dunes Resort (333 Blue Star Hwy., Douglas). Visit gogirlsaugatuck.com for ticket and accommodation information.*



## 2 Promenade at a Queer Square Dance Event

It's a string of unlikely words and also an event you really won't want to miss: queer square dance potluck. Make a dish to pass, grab some friends, and get ready to allemande, half-sashay and promenade the night away to live square dance music at Vámonos! in Detroit. The event, set for June 2 and hosted by Detroit Square Dance Society (DSDS), is open to all skill and experience levels. Event organizers promise a truly inclusive experience including gender-inclusive language, no dress codes and a culture of acceptance. All are welcome (except "bigots and haters," according to the event announcement). "Bring your open and welcoming hearts and keep respect and kindness in mind as you may see people experiencing themselves freely," event organizers write.

*June 2, 4-8 p.m. Vámonos! (4444 W. Vernor Hwy., Detroit). Learn more at bit.ly/4boI3Uu.*

The Gallery at Stone & Spoon in Ypsilanti. Photo: Facebook/@StoneAndSpoon

## 3 View Unique Queer Art in Ypsilanti

On display May 31-July 21, the "QUEER: Celebrating Work by LGBTQIA Artists" exhibit at The Gallery at Stone & Spoon in downtown Ypsilanti promises a not-to-be-missed look at the uniqueness of queer art. The exhibit, organizers write, shines light on the "multitude of creative processes taking place daily," many of which we never notice. "Whether it is handwritten in journals, painted on canvas, sewn into fabric, typed into Notes app, sung into a microphone or whispered into each other's ears, our community of artists are out here, ready to put their work into the world, and we are here for it," reads press materials.

*May 31, 5-8 p.m. (opening night reception with live music). Exhibit on display through July 21, The Gallery at Stone & Spoon (110 W. Michigan Ave., Ypsilanti).*

## Upcoming Michigan Pride Fests

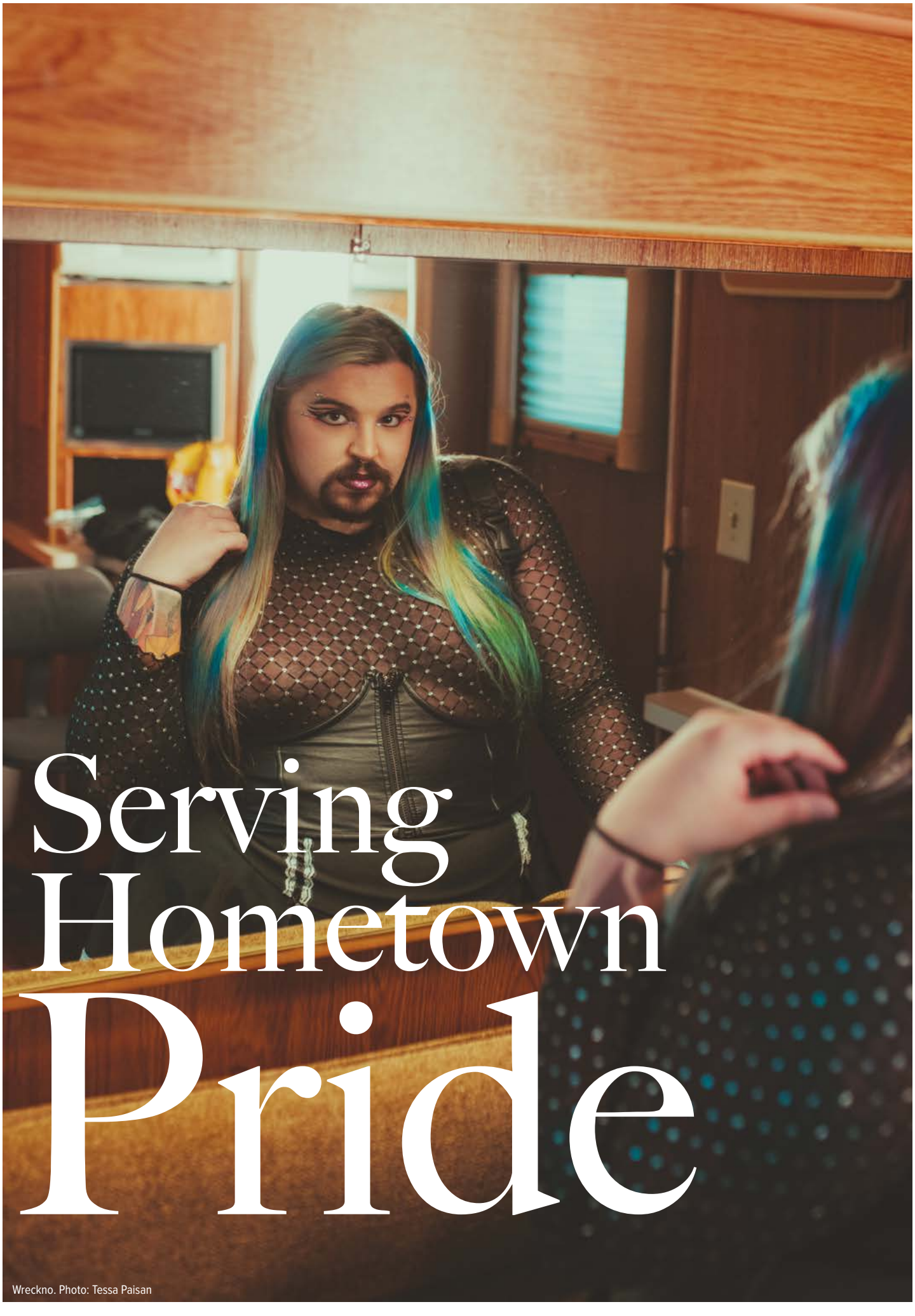
Don't sleep on these unique Michigan Pride events set for the first day of Pride Month on June 1. Each event has been created with intention and a whole lot of (very) hard work:

- **Ferndale**. Downtown Ferndale, 12:30–10 p.m. *Visit the Pride Source/ BTL Pride Booth!*
- **Keweenaw Peninsula**. Hancock Beach, 1–4 p.m.
- **Lowell**. Lowell Riverwalk, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
- **Muskegon**. Downtown Muskegon, parade kick-off at 10:30 a.m.
- **Ortonville, Abigail's Pride**. Brandon Township Community Park, 1414 N. Hadley Road, 4–8 p.m.
- **Saugatuck/Douglas**. Beery Field, 8 Center St., Douglas, 11:30 a.m.–6 p.m.

**See the 2024 Pride in Michigan calendar on page 24 and at PrideSource.com.**

## See Sing Out Detroit LGBT & Ally Chorus This Summer

Don't miss Sing Out Detroit LGBT & Ally Chorus' spring concert, "Still Standing," on June 7 at Ferndale High School. Going strong for 16 years, the mixed-gender inclusive choir is known for fun, lively performances that encourage audience participation. Proceeds from the concert will help the choir attend the annual GALA Choruses Festival in Minneapolis, a five-day gathering of LGBTQ+ choruses from all over the world. The group will also perform at Motor City Pride on June 8 and Livonia Pride on June 15. Auditions will be held Aug. 13 and 20. Visit singoutdetroit.org for more information.



Wreckno. Photo: Tessa Paisan

# Genderfluid rapper Wreckno headlines Ferndale Pride on June 1

**BY LAYLA MCMURTRIE**

Growing up in the small town of Manistee in northern Michigan, Brandon Wisniski, better known by their stage name Wreckno, didn't have much of a queer community. At least not until the genderfluid, genre-bending artist's passion for music brought them into it.

To kick off Pride season, Wreckno will headline Ferndale Pride on June 1 with, of course, an electrifying performance but also one that is, for the 27-year-old queer rapper, producer and DJ, personally meaningful. These last couple of years have been significant for Wreckno. In addition to playing at big festivals like Bonnaroo, Electric Forest and Lollapalooza, their music's also been featured in the game Fortnite and on the Peacock reboot of "Queer as Folk."

But Wreckno's musical journey began back in 2011 at the age of 15, inspired by the burgeoning electro-pop scene on mainstream radio. Together with their brother, they started creating sounds that echoed the energetic beats and catchy patterns of the genre.

"That was the first time I ever recorded, and then slowly I got super into electronic music," Wreckno tells BTL. "I started DJing in 2015 and then eventually started producing and rapping. I didn't actually record it a bunch or put it into my project at all, but eventually, it gradually came

> *That kid who was 15 putting makeup on in their small town finally has the acceptance that they always wanted.*

together."

The name Wreckno came about around the same time through performing in a high school talent show with a friend.

"The thing we were going to do was very artsy compared to the other kids in northern Michigan," Wreckno says. "It involved me dancing and her singing. But she came up with the idea. She was like, 'What if we name it Wreckno?' And from there, it became [everything from] my Tumblr URL to my Twitter handle to my whole career."

As a proudly queer multi-hyphenate, Wreckno is confident, colorful and a true product of a childhood growing up in Manistee and, later, living in the Detroit suburb of Highland Park.

"The electronic scene in Michigan has always been pretty awesome, with techno and everything that comes from Michigan," Wreckno says. "It was honestly just going to shows in Grand Rapids and Detroit and driving four hours there and four hours back up north for just one night of music. All of that created a very diehard energy around my passion for music where I just was like, 'This has to be my life. I care about this so much.' Also just growing up in the woods in Michigan, the nature Michigan has to offer, I've had so many profound moments and writing experiences in those areas, and that all definitely added to my upbringing."

Queerness is also deeply embedded in Wreckno's music. Often mistaken for a woman rapper, Wreckno's voice, once a source of bullying, has become their signature asset.

"[My voice] was the part of my queer self that just was so forthright that I couldn't even help [it]," Wreckno says. "My voice has become the thing that's really helped build a career for me. So, I think whenever I rap, or whenever I perform on stage, in drag, or anything like that, it's all very connected with my queerness. I started putting makeup on and stuff when I was 15 in a really small town, so now that I get to put that part of myself out there, it's kind of like that kid who was 15 putting makeup on in their small town finally has the acceptance that they always wanted. That definitely is a big part of my music."

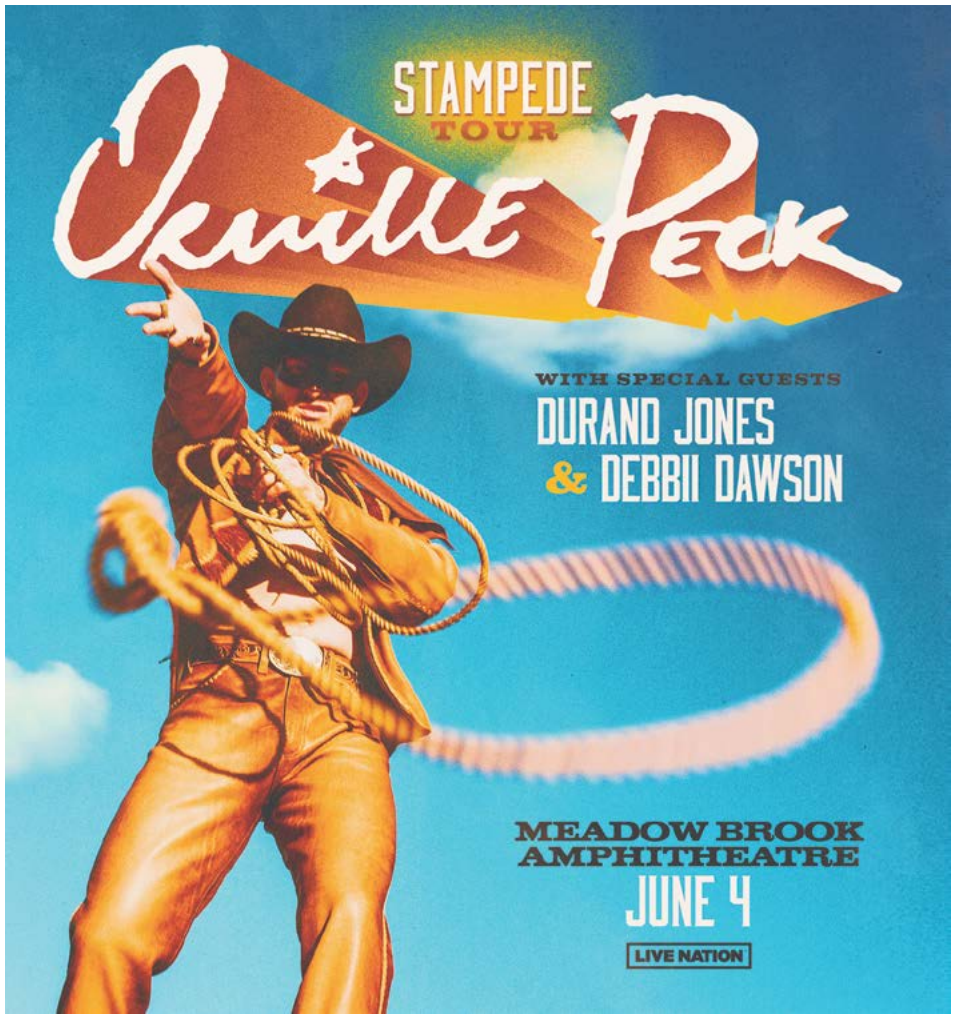
Recently, Wreckno was on a mental health retreat, a much-needed R&R break after "touring for what feels like three years straight." While staying balanced can be difficult to achieve living a busy musician life, some ways that Wreckno stays mindful is by practicing sobriety and exercising.

"Tour life, when you first start, if you don't really have the outlook of 'this is a job,' it can quickly just become a nonstop, never-ending party," Wreckno says. "My next EP is called 'Party Girl' because my life has been so influenced by my job, which is just a party every night, and finding balance is really just when you come home and when you're just yourself, doing the things that are going to heal you and take care of the person who's not on stage, whether that be nutrition or exercise or just doing things that you enjoy that have nothing to do with music. That, as well as a great support system around you, and you'll be great."

Ferndale Pride marks Wreckno's first post-tour show, and they are excited to showcase their new choreography close to home.

"I played Motor City Pride two years ago, which is where I debuted my choreography, and it's kind of just another affirmation — it's very reaffirming for me of the work that I've done as a musician," Wreckno

See **Wreckno**, page 44



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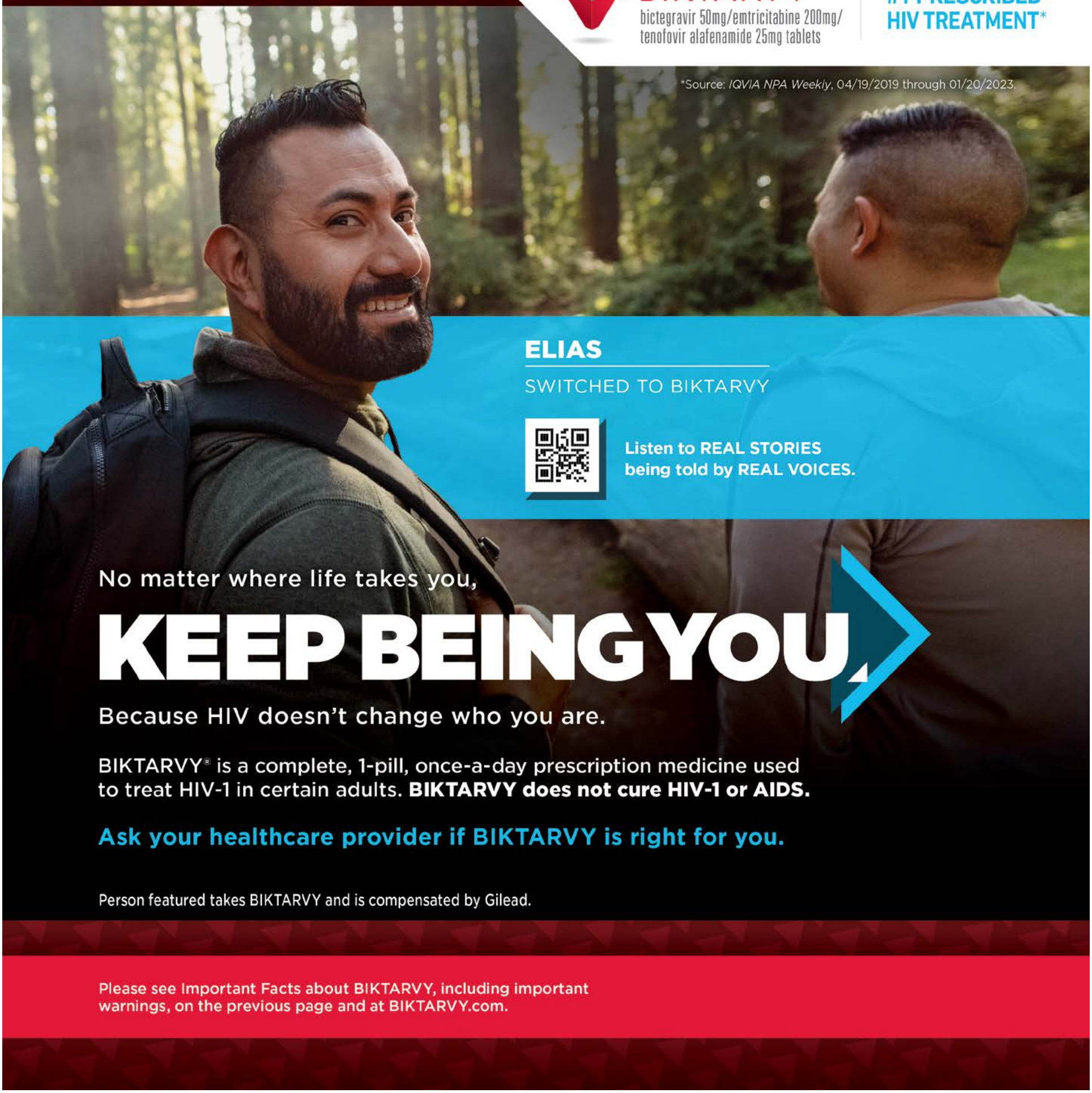

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# Lansing Pride Just Keeps Getting Bigger

## Colorful fest to light up Old Town neighborhood June 22

**BY LIAM CLYMER**

Festivalgoers at Lansing Pride 2023. Photo: LansingPride.org

Pulling off a successful community event is a tremendous undertaking, but for Lansing Pride organizers like Ben Dowd, board president, and Brad Johnson, board treasurer, the festival is well worth the effort.

"When you look out across the crowd and you see the smiles on people's faces and pure celebration during that day, that's success," Johnson said. "There'll always be stressors behind the scenes or things going on that we're working through, but when you step back and look at that crowd, you just feel this overwhelming sense of 'wow.' This is why we do what we do and that's the driving force behind continuing to make this better every year."

Just four years ago, Dowd remembers Lansing Pride as just the seed of an idea in a conversation amongst a group of people at a pizza joint. Last year, the event drew an estimated 8,000-10,000 festivalgoers, and vendors started reaching out in December to ensure they'll have a spot come June.

This year's Lansing Pride will be held on June 22 in Old Town, the city's original downtown, located just east of the Grand River. The area has a reputation as an arts and culture district characterized by eclectic and frequently queer-supportive businesses. This year's Lansing Pride will feature a special performance by Loosey LaDuca, who competed during the 15th season of "RuPaul's Drag Race," and local Lansing band Starfarm as the closing act. Dowd said from the beginning, Lansing Pride has aimed to build a connection between Lansing's culture and its LGBTQ+ community.

After the group Michigan Pride, which hosted the original Lansing Pride from 1990 to 2011, began to focus more on rallies and advocacy work, the Lansing LGBTQ+ community vocalized a need for a new group to step in, Dowd said. "The community really reached out and said, 'We need an organization that will continue to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community every year,'" he said. "Lansing's very diverse, so making sure that there's representation in our capital city is so very, very important."

Dowd said the space they curate at Lansing Pride is done with careful intention. "One of the missions of our organization is to really highlight the local parts of the LGBTQ+ community," Dowd said. "No matter where they fall into the world or where they are in their life cycle, the space we created is very intentional to include everybody."

Close behind the community's need for an intentional safe space came a need to get others involved. Dowd said that finding the right mix of people made all the difference. "Part of this is putting the right people in the room to realize how to make this successful," he explained. "[We want] to ensure that folks want to come back and that there's never a point where someone says, 'Meh, I'll go somewhere else instead of Lansing.'"

Johnson said the personal connection Lansing Pride members make with the community and partners directly impacted their rapid growth. It's about building a bond with repeat sponsors and reaching out to the "right person," he said.

Dowd said the group has paid special attention to the user experience. "We worked really hard and invested in technology to make things very simple," Dowd said. "So when [a sponsor or vendor] signs up now, they are auto-signed up, they get a contract immediately, they get an invoice, they pay it and they're done — it's just a really nice process."

The group also tries to show possible sponsors how their support has helped Lansing Pride grow. "Being able to show [sponsors] that Lansing Pride has grown substantially since year one really helps," Johnson said. "We had two to three times as many people last year as we did the first year."

With a record-breaking crowd expected this year, Lansing Pride will offer celebrations beyond the main event on June 22. The night before the festival, on June 21, there'll be a pub crawl-style party where participants can pre-celebrate Pride at multiple participating Lansing venues.

Dowd understands that some people outside the local area won't be able to make it. "If you're able to attend, that is great; and if there's something closer to your home, please support that as well," Dowd said. "All of our communities want to make sure that their space is represented, and of course we love to see everyone who can make it, but it's also really important to us that people support their more local endeavors as well."

While Michigan Pride is no longer hosting the Pride festival in Lansing, Dowd said that their Pride rally, taking place at the capital on June 1, is a good way to show support at the statewide level too.

Dowd noted that one of the strongest forms of support he'd seen in his extensive history of planning Lansing events was in the amount of people volunteering for Lansing Pride. "I've never seen this amount of people turn out to volunteer for an event ever — last year we had almost 250 volunteers for one day," Dowd explained. "There are people already signed up for this year, and it's just phenomenal. Our volunteers love to come out and help and be a part of the day and the celebration."

Johnson said that for him, success is measured in joy. "As long as everybody's happy, we're happy — then it was successful," Johnson said. "Year one it rained, but it was still a success. Everyone was happy. People were dancing in the streets. It was a great turnout in year one, even with the rain."

---

*Lansing Pride: June 22, 1-10 p.m., Old Town neighborhood. Sign up to volunteer at lansingpride.org/volunteer.*

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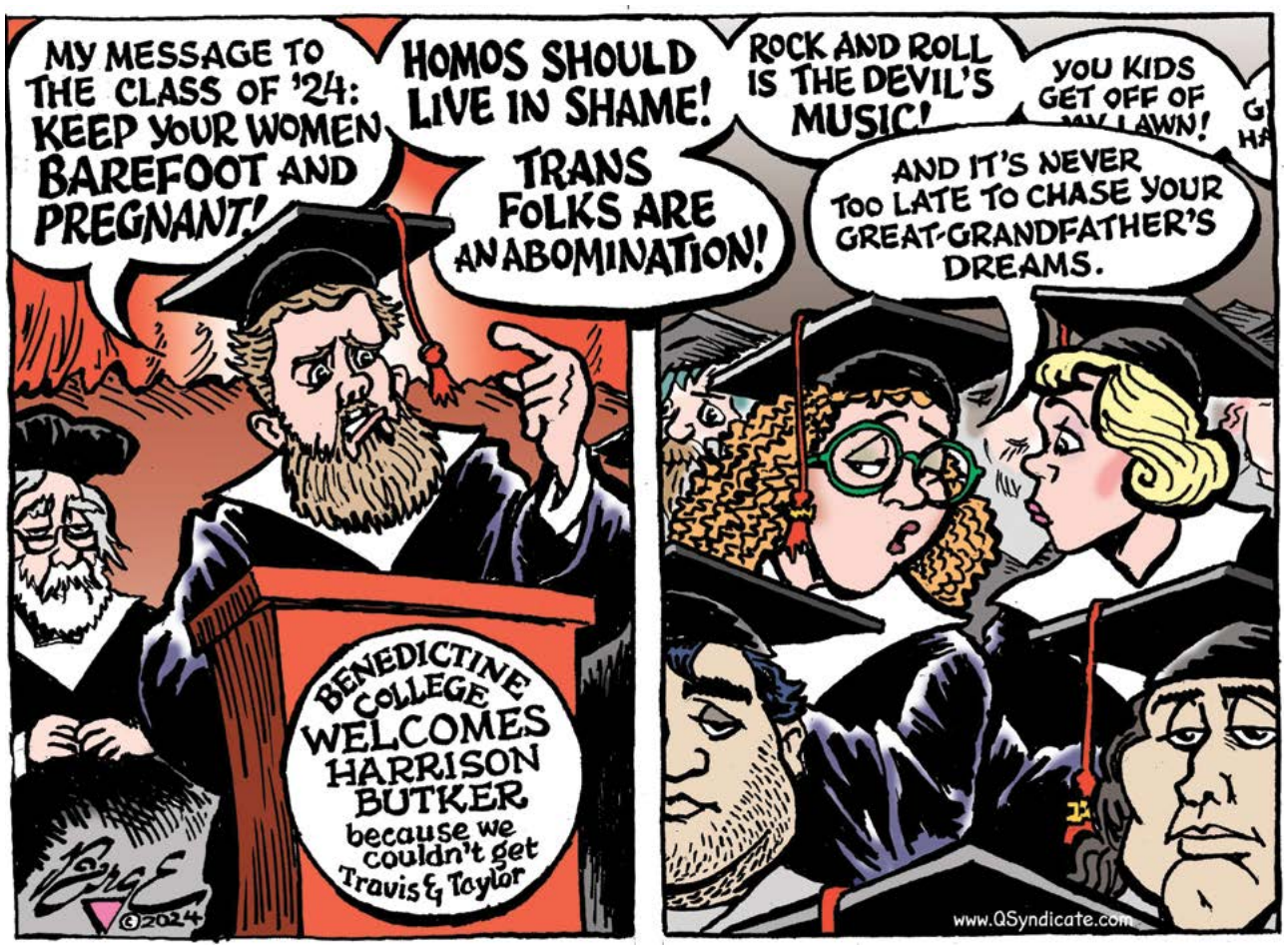
CREEP OF THE WEEK

# Gov. Reeves Tells Transgender Mississippians to Go Cis Themselves

**BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI**




Gov. Tate Reeves and his fellow Republicans want to help the children of Mississippi.

This is great news! There are so many choices! So many ways to better the lives of the state's children. None of these issues have easy solutions, but I commend Mississippi for trying.

Perhaps they'll start by addressing how the state's high poverty rate is harming kids. Or they'll take a good hard look at Mississippi's incarceration rates and ask themselves why they are locking up so many of their citizens. Or maybe they're going to make it easier and more affordable for their citizens to get health insurance.

Haha, just kidding. It's an anti-trans bathroom bill trafficking on the myth that transgender people are sex pests or worse.

According to NBC News, Gov. Reeves signed a bill into law "that would bar transgender people from using bathrooms that correspond with their gender identities in the state's public schools. The legislation, titled the Securing Areas for Females Effectively and Responsibly Act, or the 'SAFER Act,' mandates that the state's schools have single-sex restrooms, changing rooms and dormitories."

Jesus, that's a clunky acronym. I propose they replace this bill with "Letting All Transgender People Live In Peace," or the LATPLIP Act. Just rolls off the tongue.

> *Gov. Tate promises that 'Mississippi will continue to push back on' the left's 'kooky ideas,' such as bodily autonomy and basic personal freedom.*

"The signing of the SAFER Act follows the Biden-Harris administration's announcement on April 19 of new Title IX protections, including the right of transgender and nonbinary students to use bathrooms that correspond with their gender identities," reports The Advocate. "The updated rules explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, aligning with the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Bostock v. Clayton County."

According to PBS News, the SAFER Act "declares that people are either male or female 'as observed or clinically verified at birth, without regard to a person's psychological, chosen, or subjective experience, feelings, actions, or sense of self.'"

The government's out here literally outlawing a person's "sense of self."

Gov. Tate is super proud of this hateful bullshit.

"The far-left radicals aren't going to like it, but in Mississippi, we're going to protect women's spaces," a blue check marked Tate writes on X. "It's mind blowing that this is what Joe Biden's America has come to. Having to pass common sense policies that protect women's spaces was unimaginable just a few years ago. But here we are."

Ah, yes, we all remember it well. When the election was FINALLY certified on Jan. 6, 2021, the nation's first transgender person appeared as if out of thin air. And they've been rapidly multiplying ever since, and are positioned to take over the country, one women's space at a time.

"There's no doubt that the left will continue to come up with more kooky ideas that harm biological women," Tate continues.

How nice of Tate to care about "biological women." Surely this concern will be reflected in the state's abortion laws, right?

Oh, wait. According to the Center for Reproductive Rights, "On June 27, 2022, the Mississippi Attorney General certified the state's trigger ban, which bans all abortions except to save the life of the pregnant person, or in cases of rape or incest that have been reported to law enforcement."

Not a lot of care for women in that law. Not a care in the world.

Tate promises that "Mississippi will continue to push back on" the left's "kooky ideas," such as bodily autonomy and basic personal freedom. "That's because we have to — protecting girls and women from the left's dangerous agenda is just too important to ignore," Tate continues. "You have my word that as long as I'm governor, our state will do everything in its power to keep Mississippi's daughters safe."

But not the trans daughters, to be clear, something Tate did not have to saw out loud.

"This bill does nothing but attempt to push us further apart at the expense of LGBTQ+ people, who deserve the freedom to be and to use bathrooms and locker rooms without the prying eyes of politicians peering over the stall," Rob Hill, Mississippi's state director for the Human Rights Campaign, said in a statement. "Shame on the governor and the MAGA agenda of hate."

Shame, indeed. Especially when you look at the size of the transgender population in Mississippi.

According to research done by the UCLA's Williams Institute, there are an estimated 9,600 transgender adults in Mississippi, comprising 0.41% of the population," Mississippi Today reports. "The study estimates there are 2,400 trans children between the ages of 13 and 18 in Mississippi, comprising 1.2% of that population."

And the full force of the state's power is being used to directly harm and shun this small group of people. And it's all based on lies used to dehumanize. It's disgraceful.

# THE SCROLL

## QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

### Nessel Addresses MSU Attack on LGBTQ+ Students

Soon after Michigan State University police identified seven suspects connected to an April 15 assault on two LGBTQ+ college students inside MSU's main library, Attorney General Dana Nessel linked the attack to pending legislation related to the state's Ethnic Intimidation Act. Under current law, prosecutors could not charge the suspects with a hate crime, as existing state law does not prohibit intimidation, harassment, threats or harm based on an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity.

Proposed Michigan House and Senate laws seek to add LGBTQ+ protections to the Act. "I have encouraged the legislature to move forward on that," Nessel told reporters earlier this month. "This [attack] might be an example of why it's important to do so."

The MSU attack occurred about a month ahead of a U.S. State Department travel advisory urging U.S. citizens to stay alert in tourist areas and places popular with LGBTQ+ people. The May 17 alert came a week after the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security issued a joint announcement warning of potential foreign terrorist violence against LGBTQ+ events and venues. Neither alert included specific locations or threat information.

### Elder Pride Act Introduced in U.S. Congress

A recently introduced U.S. House bill aims to improve the lives of older LGBTQ+ adults, especially those living with HIV in rural areas. The Elder Pride Act, introduced by Democrat Reps. Mark Pocan, Sharice Davids and Suzanne Bonamici on May 16, would connect elders to providers and community organizations, expand nondiscrimination policies and community spaces for this population, provide sexual health and aging resources, establish a grant program to fund cultural competency training for service providers, and provide support for other care and services.

"The Elder Pride Act will improve the overall health and social and economic well-being of LGBTQI+ older adults and seniors living with HIV in rural areas by better equipping senior service providers with resources to address the unique needs of these communities," said Rep. Bonamici in a statement.

### Detroit LGBT Chamber of Commerce Names New Board Members

The Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce, which recognizes and supports LGBTQ+ and ally businesses in southeast Michigan, recently identified seven new board members. President Kevin Heard said in a statement, "This board expansion is critical to the growth and impact of our organization. The experience and passion coming onto our board is exciting and will amplify the voice of LGBTQ+ professionals, business owners and the communities we proudly serve."

The new board members include:

- Misti M. Rice, who works as executive director of government affairs at Magna
- Christina Ware, a government solutions executive for TEKsystems
- Ellen Patnaude, founder and CEO of Patnaude Coaching
- Sterling Littlejohn, Detroit Pistons community social responsibility manager
- Bill O'Dell, who serves as a member of the supplier diversity & inclusion team at Ford Motor Company
- Dorian Hooker, a senior corporate governance administrator with AAA

*For more information about the Detroit Regional LGBT Chamber of Commerce, including membership, visit detroitlgbtchamber.com.*

### Queer-Owned Jewelry Store Opens in Ferndale

Heading to Ferndale Pride? Consider a stop inside the newly relocated queer-owned jewelry store Giorgio Conti Jewelers, which features handcrafted jewelry and a mission focused on diversity, inclusion and love in all its forms, according to press materials. Find the store at 22637 Woodward Ave., a new location for the 40-year-old business. "We are thrilled to become a part of the vibrant Ferndale community," said owner Joseph Shihadeh in the statement.

### Stay Weak and Gay, Friends

Missouri Secretary of State candidate Valentina Gomez's new campaign ad has catapulted her into instant internet infamy thanks to some advice she gave in the video while jogging around St. Louis. "In America, you can be anything you want. So don't be weak and gay. Stay fucking hard," she advises viewers. Queer Twitter has had a field day with the ad. "Unfortunately 'Don't be weak and gay. Stay fucking hard' has become my motto for the summer," wrote writer Sam Stryker.

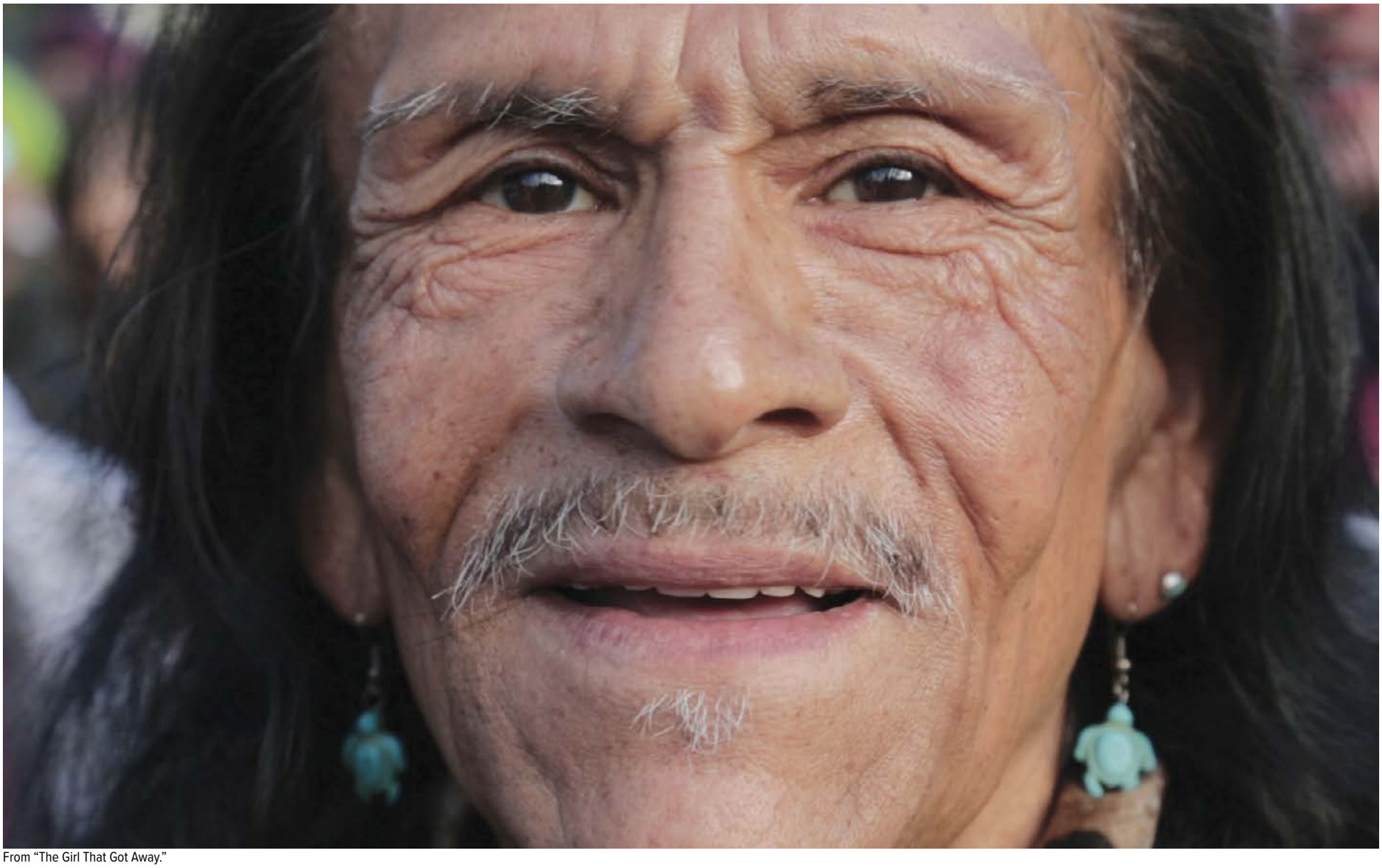
### 'Heartstopper' Season 3 Announced

Charlie and Nick's addictively charming love story will blossom into season 3 of "Heartstopper," Netflix recently announced. The new season is set to air Oct. 3 — fans are drooling over the short clip released by the streamer this month. Perhaps equally exciting is the related background snippet of the song "Birds of a Feather," from the new Billie Eilish album, "Hit Me Hard and Soft."

Joe Locke (left) and Kit Connor in "Heartstopper." Photo: Netflix

# How This Detroit Short Queer Film Series Strays Far From Identity-Based ‘Boxes’

Varied collection of queer-centered shorts to screen at Detroit Institute of Arts



From “The Girl That Got Away.”

**BY GEORGE ELKIND**

Even as short films are often the easiest to make — a truth that holds special weight for marginalized artists — they often encounter roadblocks to finding an audience. Often showing in segregated blocks in festivals or in pairings with rhyming feature-length films, these films often seem to vanish as soon as they appear, even when they’re freely available online.

It’s welcome, then, that Mighty Real/Queer Detroit, a not-for-profit focused on supporting and disseminating queer artistic work, is including a short film program as part of their signature biennial program this year. Taking the same title as this year’s chosen theme, “I’ll Be Your Mirror: Queer Documentary Shorts” offers a showcase that captures both what distinguishes and what unifies the queer experience of the past four years. The series will be shown at the Detroit Institute of Arts on June 6 at 7 p.m.

The project was pitched by filmmaker, programmer and producer Adam Baran, who’s made the most of the opportunity to showcase contemporary queer works while responding, too, to his observations from his time programming at spaces like New York’s IFC Center, Anthology Film Archives and a range of queer festivals.

Particularly when attending or selecting works for festivals, Baran noted a common tendency: to program in identity-based “boxes,” with shorts organized into blocks: “boys’ shorts, girls’ shorts, POC shorts” and the like. This ran against his notion of what he says a gay film festival should do: “break down boundaries that separate us from each other.”

“If you’re a gay guy and you’re only going into gay shorts, how are you going to learn about what your sister might be going through?” he asks. “How are you going to learn about what your friend who might come out to you as trans is going to be potentially experiencing?”

The program richly embodies this ethos without ever feeling dutiful in terms of its representational work. Instead, Baran’s program feels alive with a range of moods, tones and aesthetic responses to what queer people face today, making for expressive work which wouldn’t be possible within the cultural mainstream.

“Oscar-contending shorts have to hew to that kind of Oscar narrative, that uplifting redemption and grand scope

See **MRQD Short Films**, page 16

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◂ **MRQD Short Films**
Continued from page 14

— and queer people have never had the access to that kind of money, those kinds of means," Baran observes. "So, we eschew the mainstream narratives, the sort of mainstream way of storytelling. And that's what I love about these films."

At the same time, the shorts coalesce around a range of timely (but in many ways timeless) themes. Some speak directly to history — as in "Compton's '22," which captures the perspectives of several of the sex workers and drag queens who rioted together in 1966, years before Stonewall. But even so, many don't have to — making for natural rhymes within the material ("History repeats itself," Baran remarks).

While many seem eager to forget the pandemic already, Baran sees its fingerprints — and its impact — all over the films and on queer life today. From the loss of queer spaces to the economic precarity and social isolation it brought on, the crisis heightened a long-standing range of queer struggles rather than introducing ones that were necessarily new.

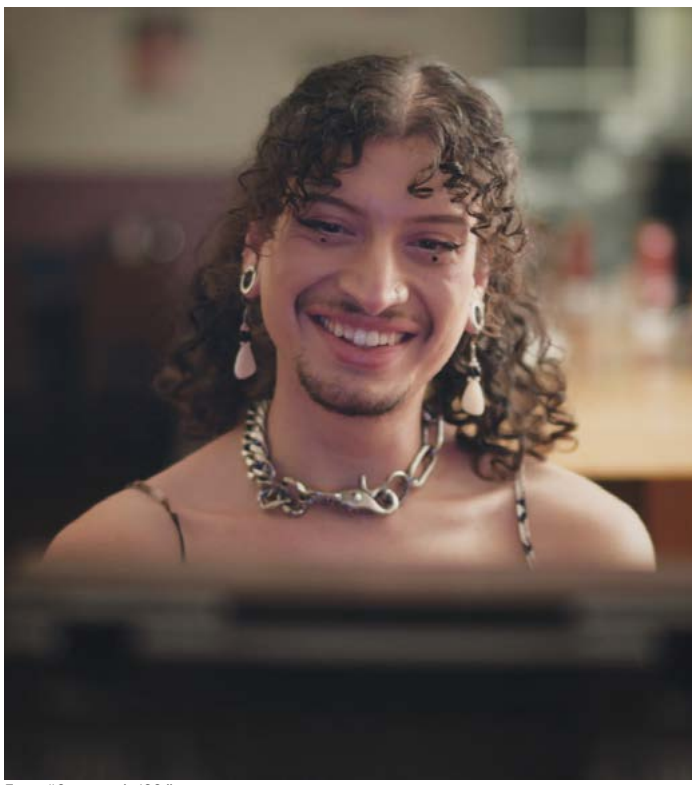
But the 98-minute program demonstrates a range of queer responses that feel no less vital for being familiar as it captures attempts, in line with the program's theme, to locate a sense of communion, whether among others or on one's own.

What follows is a brief guide to the program and some observations from both myself and Baran about the virtues of each film within it:

## "Out of the Corner of Our Eye"

2023 — directed by John Ira Palmer (11 min.)

Both a sly, stylish manifesto and an essay on the lives of queer spaces, the film deals both in joy and "the loss of space," which Baran notes as "a huge issue during Covid." Both contemporary and ageless, the film's sun-dappled compositions and bright frames counter the drab forces that have long attacked queer life.



From "Compton's '22."

## "How to Carry Water"

2023 — directed by Sasha Wortzel (16 min.)

Sasha Wortzel's luminous short opens with a steady stream of queer, fat and often disabled collaborators arcing balletically through deep springs of water, reflecting on all that gives them pleasure as they lounge in finely posed pastoral scenes. Baran terms this one "a punk-rock fairytale" by one of his favorite filmmakers. It dreams of a half-submerged Florida landscape that's become a haven for queer people — all while the film's gorgeous aquatic scenes briefly absolve climate change of its perennially haunting force.

## "Compton's '22"

2022 — directed by Drew de Pinto (16 min.)

Reflecting on film's archival qualities, Baran noted that "these shorts become a historical record for the future… as queer people, our history is often hidden from us." No film in the program seems to anticipate this quite so much as "Compton's '22," which gives voice to activists who participated in the galvanizing moment of queer and trans activism the film recounts — and works poetically with the memory of it. Doubling as a mediation on how we pass on queer history — and struggle to capture the initial sense of unifying events

See **MRQD Short Films**, page 18

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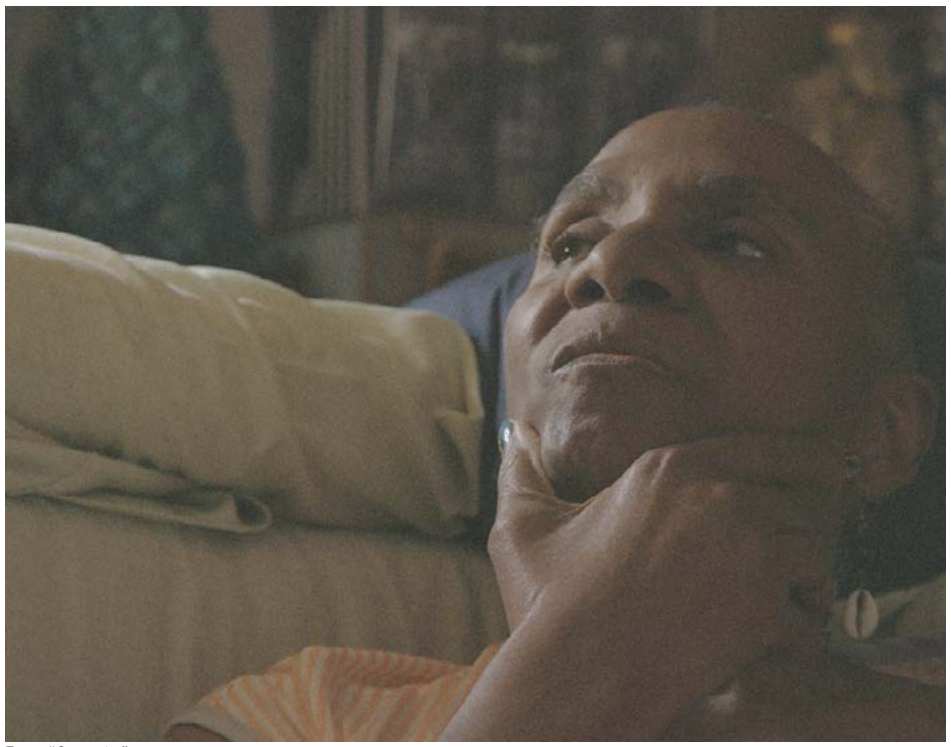
‹ MRQD Short Films
Continued from page 16

— the film accounts for that same struggle through a florid, performance-rich and always personally inflected style.


From "Queenie."

## "Queenie"

2020 — directed by cai thomas (20 min.)

An intimate portrait of "a Black lesbian elder waiting for approval to get into New York City's first LGBTQ+ senior housing unit," the film's key source of hope becomes constrained — as does its lead — by bureaucratic obstacles. Drawing out ongoing inequities which, as Baran observes, have only accelerated in the past four years, the film shines a light on the ways that fights for queer space extend well past the public.

## "The Girl That Got Away"

2023 — directed by Lauren Veen & Ephi Stempler (14 min.)

One of the program's more straightforward portraits finds a subversive power of its own in being "about rejecting the mainstream of Hollywood," as Baran notes. Observing a longtime character actor who's built a career embodying macho roles, the film finds them "struggling with transitioning, publicly transitioning, and what that might do for their career — even though that's where they need to be inside": a collision of needs dramatized with care, attention and an eye for beauty.

## "Merman"

2023 — directed by Sterling Hampton IV (10 min.)

A reflective, uplifting work sharing in the series' recurring aquatic themes as well as what Baran calls an "elder focus," "Merman" is as tender as it is varied. Spanning spaces of kink, activism, childhood struggle and self-fulfillment, the film renders scenes of 58-year-old Andre Chambers in a kaleidoscopic mode, marrying evocative animation work to frank and considered interviews, making for a bright and striking portrait of a man growing into a long dreamed of version of himself.

## "Bigger on the Inside"

2022 — directed by Angelo Madsen Minax (11 min.)

What Baran describes as "hypnotic, kind of ASMR imagery" paired with "recordings of supposed conversations with people on apps" anchor one-time Michigander Angelo Madsen Minax's wry diaristic short, which recalls pandemic isolation and ongoing efforts to find connection while often evoking science fiction. At once prickly, playful and touching, the film's key drama lies in how — for better and for worse — we have to find ourselves through others.

*"I'll Be Your Mirror: Queer Documentary Shorts" is at 7 p.m. June 6 at the Detroit Institute of Arts' Detroit Film Theatre (5200 Woodward). Find tickets at dia.org/events/ill-be-your-mirror-queer-documentary-shorts.*

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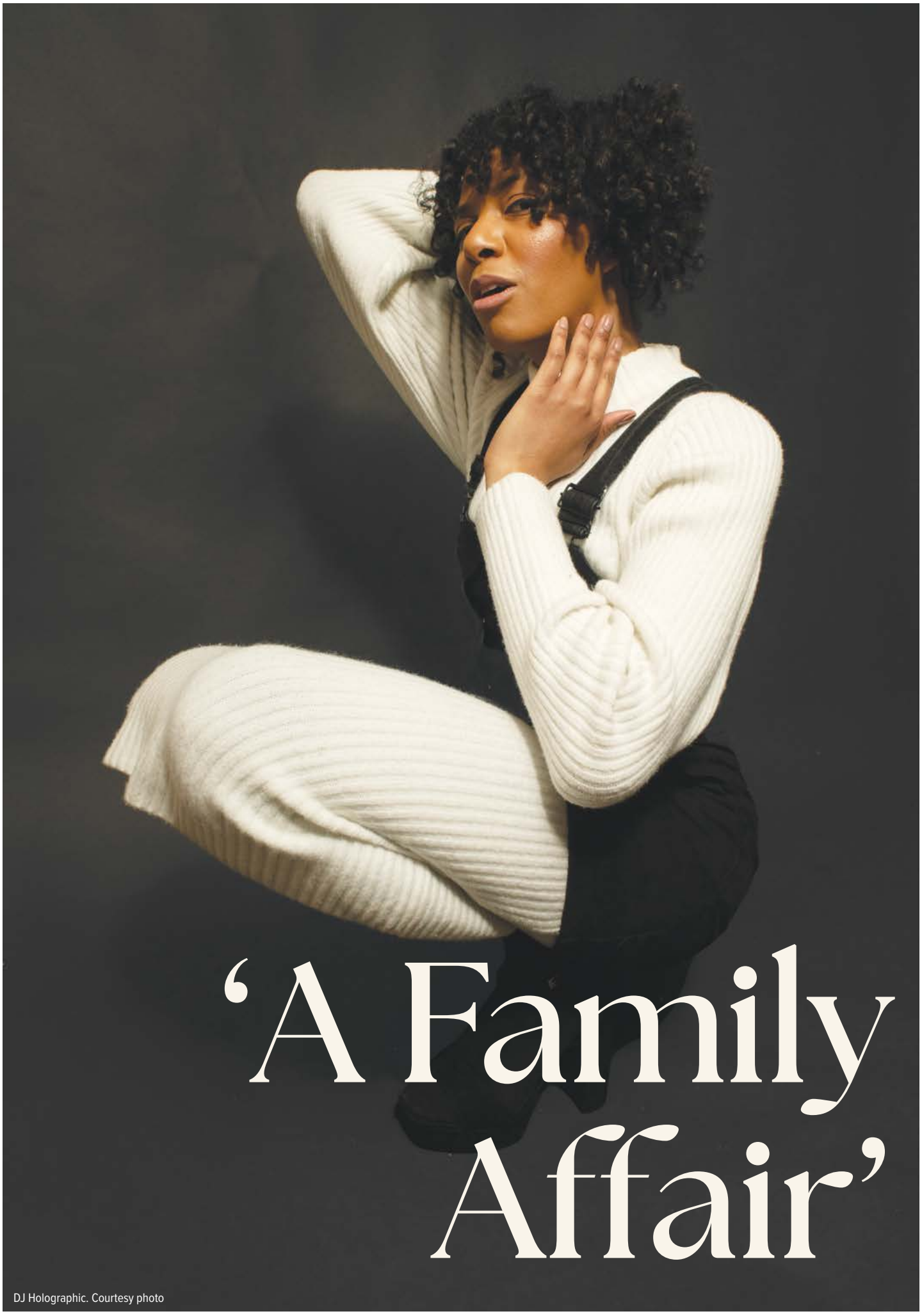

# ‘A Family Affair’

DJ Holographic. Courtesy photo

## DJ Holographic first attended Ferndale Pride as a teenager — now she’s rocking the dance stage

**BY ASHLEY D’SOUZA**

At the heart of Ferndale Pride performer Ariel Corley’s approach to music is love. That’s both unconditional love for herself and the love she feels radiating from other LGBTQ+ musicians — the kind of love you might’ve heard from her set during the opening day of the Movement Music Festival in Hart Plaza last week.

In fact, Corley’s first inspiration to pursue music as a house, techno and disco DJ and producer — in Detroit, Corley is better known as DJ Holographic — came from witnessing the strength of the trans community through watching Octo Octa, a trans house producer and DJ, perform at Marble Bar in Detroit with her partner, Eris Drew. She was struck by the power of their own self-love during the performance.

“They were falling in love with each other, falling in love with their music, and then falling in love with themselves again and again on stage,” Corley says. “They were so in love while also going through their story of transitioning, and it was why I started to love music and made it my life.”

As she spoke with me from her hotel room in São Paulo, Brazil, just before playing the Time Warp Brasil festival that night, I could feel this love emanating through the phone.

“When I have unconditional love for myself, it can flow into others and into my external world,” she says. “I want people to be able to fall in love with themselves, and I wish for them to receive it.”

That love will radiate when Corley plays Ferndale Pride’s dance stage, an event that is near and dear to her heart, at 8 p.m. June 1. She first attended Ferndale Pride at 18, when she and her friends were still figuring themselves out, she notes, but she hasn’t

> *"I want people to be able to fall in love with themselves, and I wish for them to receive it."*

been able to attend in years due to travel. She is treating this year's performance as a homecoming. "It's going to feel like a family affair," she says, "and I'm really excited for that."

Corley grew up on the west side of Detroit surrounded by music, from Motown to R&B and rock, and acquired her musical taste from her mom, dad and grandmother. Music was always around — on the radio, heard through records and tapes — and before she was old enough to understand song lyrics, she learned melodies by heart.

"I knew the melodies and rhythm, but I never knew the artists' faces and personality types," she said, recounting her disappointment when she learned as a child that some of her favorite artists weren't Black. "Detroit is a majority Black city, so I thought most of the people I listened to on the radio were Black. I was kind of shocked to find out that David Bowie wasn't," she adds, laughing.

DJ Holographic. Courtesy photo

As a DJ, Corley still draws inspiration from her early influences like Bowie and Prince, integrating the energy of their romantic ballads into her storytelling. Within the production realm, she feels more akin to Erykah Badu; both share a deeply spiritual process of creating music.

When she was 22, Corley's mother died. The devastation of this experience drove her to achieve something big in her life, though she didn't yet know that it would be music. "I was pissed off at the universe and at God, and I was in a mental state of 'you owe me,'" she says, adding that the "harsh experience" molded her into a better person.

Corley, now 34, has performed all over the world, but her favorite city to play is still in her hometown of Detroit. Like many DJs, she got her start playing at house parties and sports bars in the city. She also played

See **DJ Holographic**, page 31


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# Anti-LGBTQ+ Conspiracist Robert F. Kennedy to Appear on Michigan Ballot

## Not even most of his own family supports him

**BY HANK KENNEDY**

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., son of slain 1968 Presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, has officially qualified for the November ballot in Michigan. Kennedy and running mate Nicole Shanahan are running as the Natural Law Party's candidates in the Wolverine State.

The Party is akin to a political zombie, living on for two decades since the national Natural Law Party, which was notable for endorsing transcendental meditation as a panacea for a host of social ills, collapsed in 2004. The Michigan branch survived by making alliances with other small parties. It has given its ballot line to other minor party candidates in the past such as the Socialist Party's Emidio Soltysyk and the Alliance Party's Rocky de la Fuente.

Kennedy is by now most famous for his advocacy of conspiracy theories involving vaccines, including the vaccine against Covid. In 2015, Kennedy told a crowd that mandatory vaccinations are "a holocaust." At a 2022 anti-vaccine rally, Kennedy compared opposition to vaccines to the life of Anne Frank, who hid from the storm troopers of Nazi Germany. Ironically, for all his invocations of the Nazi genocide, Kennedy found allies in the Neo-Nazi National Democratic Party. Kennedy spoke at an anti-vaccine assemblage in Berlin organized by the Neo-Nazi group and another far-right party, Alternative for Germany.

In his Quixotic crusades against vaccines, pathology and the scientific method, Kennedy has crossed into overt anti-Semitism. When claiming, with no evidence, that Covid was a biological weapon, he stated the virus was "ethnically targeted." Who did Kennedy say would be spared from this supposedly engineered virus? Ashkenazi Jews and Chinese people.

In his alliances with Nazis and dalliances with anti-Semitism, Kennedy is reliving the experience of his grandfather, Joseph P. Kennedy Sr. The elder Kennedy was a Nazi sympathizer who disdained democracy. Kennedy Sr. was quoted in the Boston Globe as saying "Democracy is finished in England. It may be here," meaning in the United States. His personal correspondence was filled with anti-Semitic invective directed at the "Jew media" and the "Killers of Christ." Joseph Kennedy's defeatism and anti-Semitism understandably cost him his job as President Roosevelt's ambassador to England. Those of you who are historically aware may wonder if Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is even conscious that he is following in his grandfather's footsteps. Wherever Joe Sr. is, he's surely smiling upon his grandson.

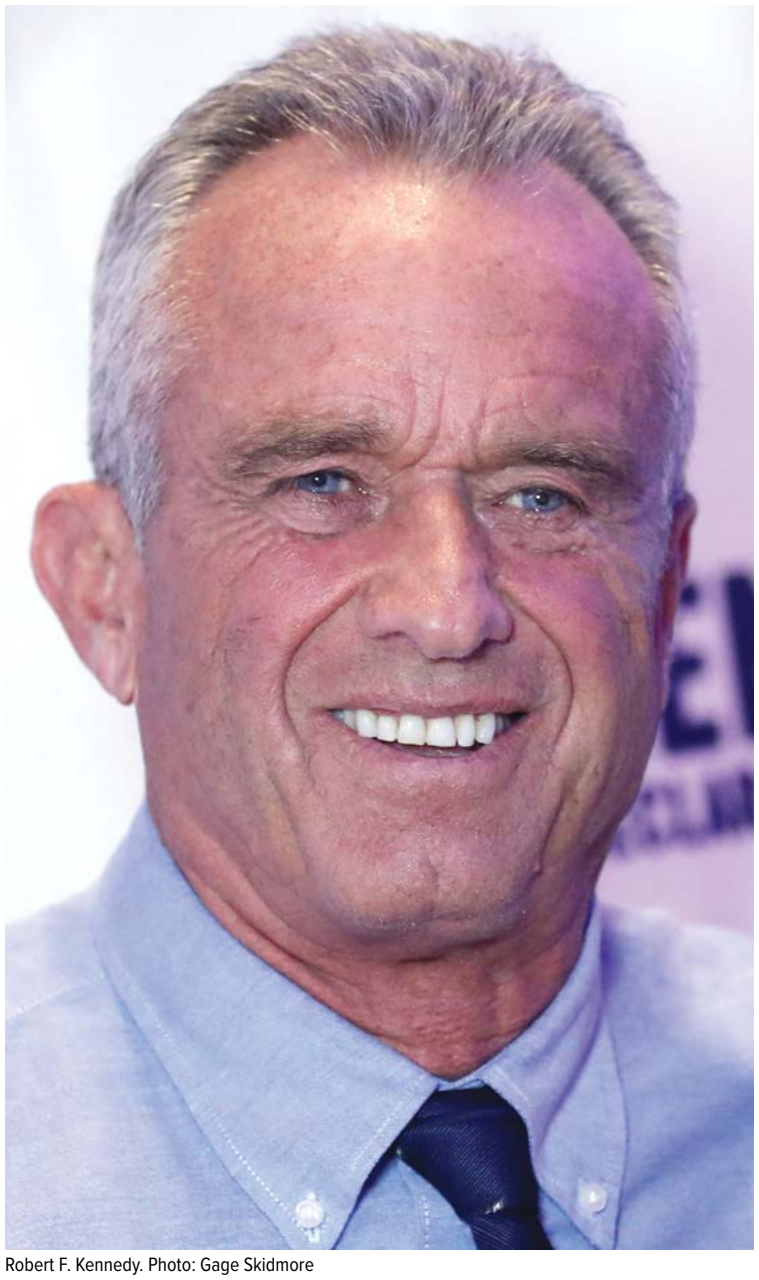
Kennedy's frenzied opposition to vaccines has consumed much of the media attention about him and his campaign. This has unfortunately allowed some of his other bizarre beliefs to fly under the radar. Kennedy has spread the unsound idea that HIV is not the cause of AIDS. Instead of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Kennedy puts the blame on poppers and "a gay lifestyle," whatever he means by that.

In denying that HIV causes AIDS, Kennedy has further allied himself with the American right. During the heyday of HIV/AIDS denialism in the early '90s, the conservative Heritage Foundation — of Project 2025 infamy — put out articles asking questions like "Is the AIDS Virus a Science Fiction?" and "Is HIV the Cause of AIDS?" Both articles were authored by discredited molecular biologist Peter Duesberg. HIV/AIDS denialism can have disastrous consequences as seen by the example of South Africa, where hundreds of thousands died because the government endorsed false theories about the cause of AIDS.

Another theory floated by Kennedy is that trans children are the result of "swimming through a soup of toxic chemicals." Kennedy made the transphobic claim during an interview with anti-trans professor Jordan Peterson. Kennedy told the far-right Canadian political pundit that "chemical exposure" was responsible for cases of juvenile depression and "sexual dysphoria." In spreading this theory, which has no scientific basis, Kennedy was echoing a similar theory spread by Sandy Hook-truther Alex Jones, who infamously claimed scientists were "putting chemicals in the water that turn the friggin' frogs gay."

Aside from spreading anti-LGBTQ+ conspiracy theories, Kennedy has sought support from at least one hate group. Last year, the candidate announced he would speak, alongside GOP candidates Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis, at the annual convention of Moms for Liberty, a Southern Poverty Law Center-designated extremist organization. The group has led the charge to ban books dealing with queer themes or other "woke" issues. Kennedy has apparently not followed the words of his uncle, President John F. Kennedy, who remarked that "libraries should be open to all — except the censor." The actual convention did not see a Kennedy appearance, as he claimed a scheduling conflict prevented him from attending. It is also possible he determined discretion was the better part of valor when it transpired that the Indiana chapter of the group was sending out a newsletter with a quote from Adolf Hitler on the cover.

One Michigander who definitely would support Kennedy is former Congressman Clare E. Hoffman, a Republican who had some major similarities with the candidate. Like Kennedy, he was chummy with Nazis. "Many of us doubt that Germany wants more than has been asked through the ages by every people," Hoffman reassured, "by every nation, which has found itself with territory too small…" Also like Kennedy, Hoffman endorsed conspiracy theories about public health. The congressman argued that water fluoridation and the Polio vaccine were not medical advancements that would improve well-being, but poisons being slipped into the unwitting public. Unfortunately for Kennedy's campaign, Hoffman died in 1967.



Robert F. Kennedy. Photo: Gage Skidmore

In a shocking recent poll from the Marketing Resource Group, 13% of Michiganders said they would vote for Kennedy, despite nearly his entire family (who would presumably know him best) opposing his candidacy and supporting incumbent Joe Biden. Given his appalling rhetoric and record, it should be clear that Kennedy doesn't deserve the vote of a single queer person, or a single supporter of LGBTQ+ rights. His own family set a good example by shunning his campaign.

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# Aurora sighting.

## (Pride Month Version)

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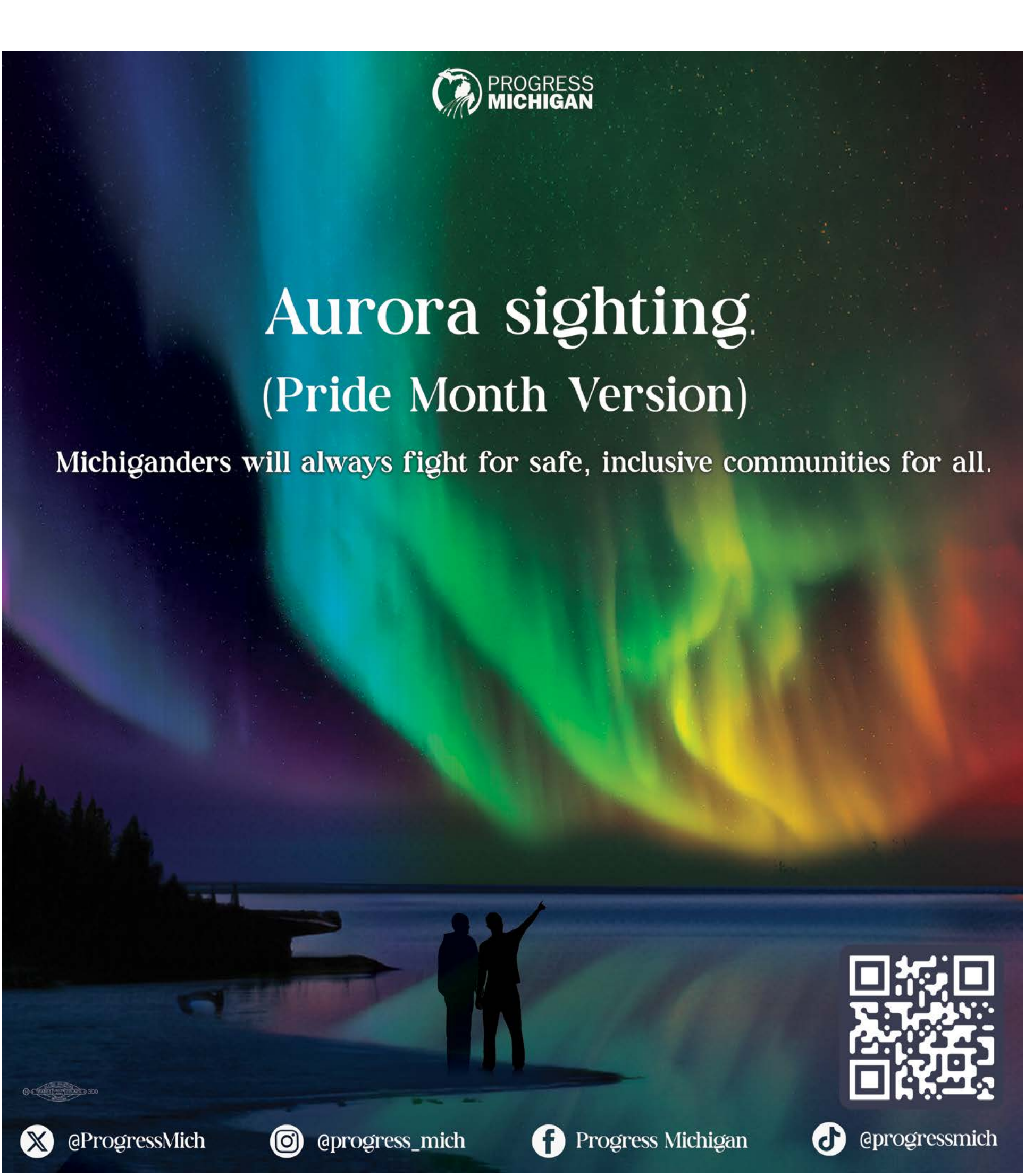

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Scenes from local Pride fests over the year. Photos: BTL archives

# Your 2024 Michigan LGBTQ+ Pride Calendar

**Michigan Pride 2024** is rolling, and we have all the details you need to plan out your Pride season right here. You'll find Prides big and small from all over the state, and a few bonus events from outside the Mitten, too.

## JUNE

### Saturday, June 1

#### Ferndale Pride
**Downtown Ferndale, 12:30–10 p.m.**

Celebrating its 14th year, Ferndale Pride is back for another jam-packed day of queer delights. In addition to a long list of food, drink and merchandise vendors, enjoy events like aerobatic performances in the children's area, free sexual health screenings at Affirmations community center, cat and dog adoptions, drag story time, entertainment from the Ferndale Elks, and feature musical act Wreckno. *FerndalePride.com*

#### Keweenaw Pridefest
**Hancock Beach, 1–4 p.m.**

The second annual Keweenaw Pride event, themed "Here and Queer," will include musical guests Mr. Cesar, Rat Bath, Deep Fried Butterfly and Bees! Bees! Bees! Bees! Bees! Enjoy food trucks, lawn games, face painting and community tables along the beautiful Portage Lake shorefront at Hancock Beach. *keweenawpridefest.org*

#### Lowell Pride
**Lowell Riverwalk, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.** *lowellPrideorg*

#### Muskegon Pride
**Downtown Muskegon, parade kick-off at 10:30 a.m.** *facebook.com/MuskegonPrideX*

#### Ortonville ("Abigail's Pride")
**Brandon Township Community Park. 1414 N. Hadley Road, Ortonville, 4–8 p.m.**

Back for its third year despite pushback from the local town council, Abigail's Pride will be held in a new location away from downtown Ortonville in 2024. The festival is the brainchild of Abigail Rowe, who, at age 14, embarked on a plan to bring a Pride event to her town so that queer kids like her had a day where they felt affirmed and loved. Three years later, Abigail's dream lives on. Enjoy music, food and family-friendly fun at this Pride-in-the-park event. *abigailspride.godaddysites.com*

#### Saugatuck/Douglas Pride — various events from May 30 to June 2
**Parade kick-off: Downtown Saugatuck, June 1, 10:30 a.m.**

**Pride in the Park: Beery Field (8 Center St., Douglas), June 1, 11:30 a.m.–6 p.m.** *communitypridemi.org*

### Friday, June 7

#### OutFront Kalamazoo — through June 8
**Arcadia Creek Festival Place. 145 E. Water St.**

Kalamazoo Pride draws around 8,000 people each year to an annual two-day Pride festival featuring drag performances, music, exhibitors, food, dancing and more. *outfrontkzoo.org/pride2024*

#### Ypsilanti (Ypsi Pride)
**Depot Town, 5–10 p.m.** *facebook.com/YpsiPride*

### Saturday, June 8

#### Dowagiac (Cass County PrideFest)
New Pride Event!

**Dowagiac Library Pavilion**

**206 Main St., 4–8 p.m.** Part of "PrideFest On Tour" — three Pride events in the Berrien, Cass or Van Buren tri-county region. *outcenter.org/pridefest*

#### Grand Haven Pride
**Downtown Grand Haven, 12–9 p.m.** *ghpride.org/events*

#### Holly Pride
**American Legion Post #149. 408 S. Saginaw St., 12–5 p.m.** *facebook.com/ACTHOLLY*

#### Detroit (Motor City Pride) — through June 9
**Hart Plaza, June 8: 1–9 p.m., June 9: 12:30–7 p.m.**

Parade: June 9, 12 p.m., Kick-off at Fort & Griswold, ends at Hart Plaza

The largest annual Pride fest in Michigan, Motor City Pride draws tens of thousands of people to Hart Plaza for a sprawling event with fun for all ages. Live music across four stages, plentiful food and drink options, and family- and pet-friendly amenities make for a whole weekend of entertainment. *MotorCityPride.org*

Help us keep our calendar up to date! Email sarah@pridesource.com with details about fests we're missing.

### Saturday, June 15
#### Grosse Pointe Pride

Grosse Pointe Village, at St. Clair, 12–2 p.m. *wegp.org/Pride-2022-Details*

#### Howell Pride Parade
**Downtown., 12–3:30 p.m.**

Also: Howell Rainbow Reception, June 3. Brighton Amphitheater, 12–3 p.m. *livingstondiversity.org/*

See **2024 Pride Calendar**, page 28

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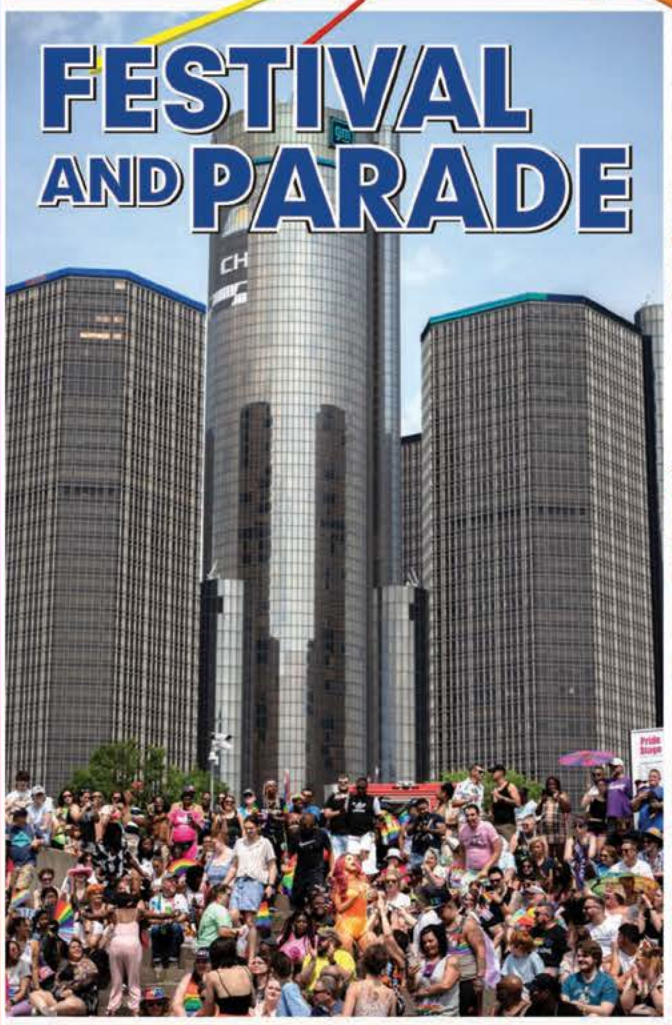

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2024 Pride Calendar
Continued from page 24

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### Livonia Pride
**Civic Park, 15218 Farmington Road, 11 a.m.–3 p.m.** *livonia.gov/1984/Livonia-Pride-Fest*

### Marquette (Upper Peninsula Rainbow Pride)
**Mattson Lower Harbor Park, 200 N Lakeshore Blvd., 1–10:30 p.m.** *uprainbowPrideorg/events*

### Niles (Michiana PrideFest)
**Riverfront Park, Niles Riverfront, 4–8 p.m.**

Part of "PrideFest On Tour" — three Pride events in the Berrien, Cass or Van Buren tri-county region. *outcenter.org/pridefest*

## Saturday, June 22

### Benton Harbor (Twin Cities PrideFest)
**Dwight P. Mitchell Park, 100 E. Main St., Benton Harbor, 4–8 p.m.**

Part of "PrideFest On Tour" — three Pride events in the Berrien, Cass or Van Buren tri-county region. *outcenter.org/pridefest*

### Grand Rapids Pride
**Calder Plaza, 320 Ottawa Ave. NW, 12–10 p.m.**

Grand Rapids Pride will celebrate its 36th annual festival in 2024. One of the largest one-day events held in the city each year, the festival is a true community event brimming with family-friendly activities, live music on multiple stages, dozens of food and drink options, drag performances and more. *grpride.org/pride-festival/*

### Bay City (Great Lakes Bay Pride)
**Wenonah Park, 801 N Water St., 11 a.m.–6 p.m.** *greatlakesbayPrideorg*

### Lansing Pride
**Old Town, 1–10 p.m.**

A few years ago, Lansing Pride had shrunk to a small gathering each year in the state's capitol after picking up from where Michigan Pride, held from 1990-2011, left off. But in recent years, Lansing Pride has roared back. Now a full-day event that draws thousands of attendees to the vibrant Old Town neighborhood, the fest features a long day of live music, drag shows (including a meet-and-greet following Loosey LaDuca's feature performance), food trucks, a beer tent, a children's area with drag story time and nearly 200 vendors.*LansingPride.org*

### Owosso Pride
**Curwood Castle Park, 224 Curwood Castle Dr., 1–5 p.m.** *facebook.com/OwossoPride*

### Rochester (Pride in the Park)
**Rochester Municipal Park — Kiwanis Pavilion, 400 6th St., 12–4:30 p.m.** *instagram.com/rochprideinthepark*

### Saint Ignace Pride
**American Legion Park, 200 N. State St., 11 a.m.–3 p.m.** *straitspride.org/events*

### Wyandotte (Downriver Pride)
New Pride Event!

**Downtown Wyandotte, 12 p.m.-11 p.m.** *downriverpride.com*

## Sunday, June 23

### Berkley Pride
**Downtown Berkley, 1–5 p.m. downtownberkley.com/berkley-pride**

### OutFront Kalamazoo Youth Pride
New Pride Event!

**Girl Scouts Heart of Michigan, 601 W. Maple St., 12–5 p.m.**

Kalamazoo's first-ever Pride event specifically geared towards LGBTQ+ youth will feature games, music, food and fun for all ages. *outfrontkzoo.org/youthpride2024*

## Saturday, June 29

### Flint Pride
**Riverbank Park, 1 Riverfront Ctr W., 2–8 p.m.** *facebook.com/flintgaypride*

### Holland Pride
**Centennial Park, 250 Central Ave., 12–5 p.m.**

Holland Pride's host organization, Out on the Lakeshore, has faced down an unfriendly local government to get this year's festival off the ground. The conservative Ottawa County Commissioners withdrew funding, drawing national headlines, but Out on the Lakeshore rallied the community to fund an LGBTQ-affirming, family-friendly event complete with food, entertainment and a renewed spirit to continue the fight

See **2024 Pride Calendar**, page 39

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## From crafts to a carefully curated queer film fest, the library is the perfect break from Pride fest crowds

**BY JASON COLLINS**

You could fill up every moment of free time from now until the end of June with a Pride fest somewhere in Michigan, but that kind of nonstop socializing and frenetic energy isn't for everyone. It's a good thing, then, that the Ann Arbor District Library is here with a month of activities that capture the spirit and joy of Pride in more intimate settings.

Rich Retyi, Ann Arbor District Library communications and marketing manager, tells BTL that the library celebrates Pride to encourage community engagement and, of course, for the sheer enjoyment and fun Pride season offers each year.

You'll find activities the whole family can enjoy (and plenty of adult-focused events) at the library's main branch and select satellite branch locations.

### Family-Friendly Pride Events

#### "Love Makes a Family"

Saturday, June 1 through Sunday, June 30, Malletts Creek Branch (3090 E. Eisenhower Pkwy.)

Start your Pride month by taking a trip to the traveling exhibit "Love Makes a Family," which showcases a series of interviews and photographs featuring LGBTQ+ families. This display explores topics like overcoming stereotypes and other challenges LGBTQ+ people often face. With child-friendly elements, this exhibit is great for the whole family and is sure to encourage honest conservation.

#### Gumball Pride Necklaces

Thursday, June 20, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Westgate Branch (2503 Jackson Ave.)

Do something creative this Pride month and make a unique piece of jewelry that is both fun to look at and snack on. The kid-friendly gumball Pride necklace workshop is where you can make a fun rainbow necklace. Adults are welcome, too!

#### Yarn-Wrapped Rainbows

Friday, June 28, 3-4 p.m., Malletts Creek Branch (3090 E. Eisenhower Pkwy.)

Get crafty and celebrate Pride while learning how to make some bright and cheerful yarn-wrapped rainbows. Complete your yarn rainbow with cute fluffy clouds and attach a string so you can show off your hard work. This craft is suited for children 5 to 11 years old.

### Ann Arbor District Library Queer Film Series

#### "Pariah"

Monday, June 3, 6-7:30 p.m., Downtown Library (343 S. 5th Ave.)

The first film screening hosted by Ann Arbor District Library in June is Dee Rees' "Pariah," a

See **AADL**, page 34

◂ DJ Holographic
Continued from page 21

shows at the now-defunct Smarty Catz in Ypsilanti, and she worked as a coat-check attendant at Necto in Ann Arbor before eventually performing there.

Her favorite spot to play in Detroit is Marble Bar, which was previously the Detroit Eagle, a leather daddy bar, long before she first performed there. The bar held a queer after-hours party called Grenadier, which began as a trans woman-dedicated event and eventually opened to the entire techno and electronic music community. It became a melting pot for anybody and everybody, Corley said, but some of the straight people who were welcomed in forgot that the event used to be a queer safe space.

DJ Holographic. Courtesy photo

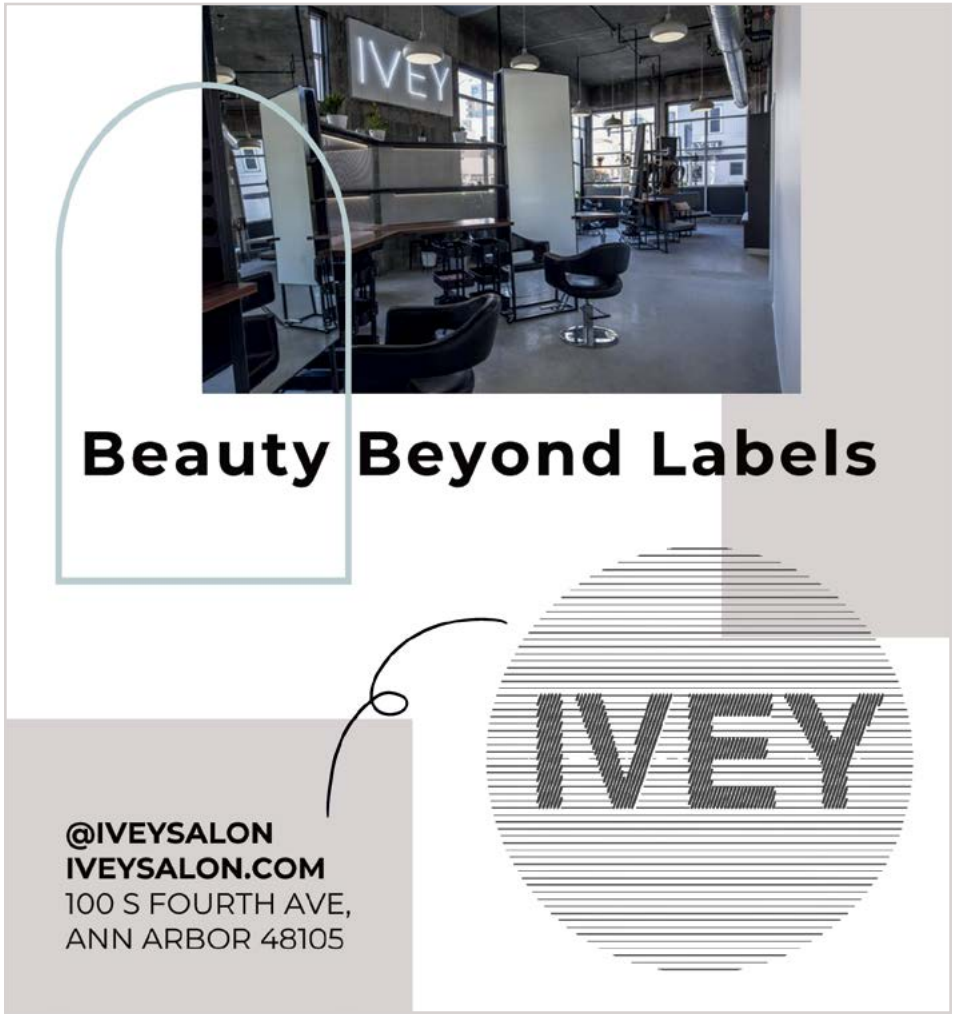
Today, Corley is still drawn to those safe spaces, places where most of her gigs happen, and she's noticed a significant difference in the energy of dominantly straight clubs. "In those spaces, people have told me that I need to be more aggressive. No, I don't," she says. "I just have to be myself. If your limited mindset means that I need to be an aggressor toward you, then I don't need to be in your space, and you don't deserve to have me there."

As a creator, Corley nurtures her music until it blooms, guided by her femme identity. "A lot of femmes are very intentional, no matter what bodies they're in," she says, noting the stark contrast between her music and that of her masculine, dominant male peers, who she said simply pump out songs because they can without intention to develop them further. "Are you going to take this song to kindergarten?" she asks. "Are you going to take it to college?"

Corley recently launched her new label, Through the Veil. She was inspired by W. E. B. Du Bois' "The Souls of Black Folk," a book that explores the idea that Black people have double consciousness from seeing themselves through the eyes of a racist white society in America. Corley's "veil" adds queerness and being Black in other parts of the world to Du Bois' double consciousness. By breaking through the veil, she said, you open your spiritual consciousness, transcending externally imposed labels. "You see past the bullshit of 'you're this' and 'you're that,' and see that we're all one soul and identity."

She is also releasing one song per month for a year on Through the Veil, with each song dedicated to a different zodiac sign. The latest release, Taurus, features vocals from her house mother, Shaun J. Wright.

"He has the same name as my mom who passed away," she says. "It was one of those moments where I realized I'm in the right place, and I'm doing the right thing."



# ‘I’m Trying to Seduce You’

Tiff Massey’s new DIA show, ‘7 Mile + Livernois,’ shines a spotlight on Avenue of Fashion neighborhood and the culture of Black adornment

Tiff Massey. Courtesy photo

**BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT**

It’s not that Detroit artist Tiff Massey wants audiences to find her work inscrutable. She simply wants visitors checking out her new Detroit Institute of Art exhibit, “7 Mile + Livernois,” to walk in uninfluenced.

So, ahead of the exhibit’s early May 2024 opening, the Black queer artist avoids telling BTL exactly what to expect. She’s mum about the scope of the exhibit, including the size of the pieces that will be on display (she’s known for creating large-scale metalwork pieces) and what she’s trying to express with the artworks she’s painstakingly created. “That’s not up to me,” she says in late April. “I’m trying to seduce you. I can tell you that.”

“Tiff Massey is an internationally recognized artist, but has never had a major museum exhibition in her hometown of Detroit,” says DIA curator Katie Pfohl. “This is a chance to celebrate one of the city’s most accomplished artists and also give Tiff the platform to create her most ambitious work to date. Tiff’s commitment to the city of Detroit, her technical ability and her innovative art practice merging metalsmithing, installation art and community work makes her an ideal artist to showcase at the DIA.”

At the time of this writing, ahead of the exhibit opening, Massey, 42, seems a little frustrated with promotional efforts, and not because there’s a lack of interest. Talking to journalists about her artwork has become common in the weeks leading up to the opening, and she’s happy to talk about the exhibit and her background, but only in general terms.

“The objects referencing my childhood in the exhibit, for example, talk about labor. They talk about being nurtured, about love, essentially — and in some of that, there could be pain,” she says, hesitantly. “It’s more interesting to see what everybody else feels, essentially because I’m literally trying to talk to you about a show… but I’m giving you nothing, intentionally.”

“If I told you ‘This is what the work is about,’ that might not be your interpretation,” she explains. “That’s what is the beautiful thing about contemporary [art] — you can have multiple conversations about the same thing, and it could be something just very simple but still very, very loaded in context.”

Since becoming a professional artist in the early 2000s, Massey’s art practice has

evolved from unique jewelry pieces to encompassing metal sculpture work and larger-than-life public art installations, all inspired by the adornment practices she has witnessed in Detroit and that have been an important part of West African and Black American cultures throughout history. One piece in this exhibit is a sprawling sculpture installation called "Whatupdoe," created from steel architectural beams. Massey applied her metalsmithing skills to craft the 13,000 pounds of metal into the form of a giant necklace.

The "7 Mile + Livernois" exhibit is the "most ambitious exhibition that the DIA has ever done for a Detroit artist," says Pfohl, who adds, "Tiff Massey is also the youngest artist ever to receive a solo show at the DIA. This is also the first time in many years that the museum has commissioned an artist to create work specifically for the DIA, in dialogue with the museum's spaces and collection."

What Massey can tell curious art enthusiasts is that her work at the DIA — an exhibit a year in the making that has taken months of work planning organizing, transporting and assembling hundreds of pieces — is a reflection of how Detroit and its people imprinted on her as she grew up near Seventh and Livernois (the Avenue of Fashion district).

Massey didn't set out to forge a career as a full-time artist. In fact, she started her higher education journey pursuing a biology degree with a minor in chemistry at Eastern Michigan University, and though she did receive her bachelor's of science in the field, a career in science wasn't her destiny — the "monotony" of her studies led her to a different path. "I would take metalsmithing classes to break up that monotony of studying all the time and having to memorize all these formulas and things," she explains. She relished the opportunity to "just work with my hands, and to just make the things that were in my head."

> *"If I told you 'This is what the work is about,' that might not be your interpretation."*
>
> — Tiff Massey

Soon, Massey was channeling childhood memories into her jewelry creations — how her parents would adorn themselves and how people in her neighborhood presented themselves in public. Massey also points to 1980s jewelry designs and the era of "bling," when jewelry pieces often included platinum and layers of diamonds as inspirations for some of her scaled-up sculptures. "I watched these styles change, and growing up in

See **Tiff Massey**, page 48

◂ AADL
Continued from page 30

film selected for preservation in 2022 in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress for its cultural significance. "Pariah" is a coming-of-age story that represents the experiences of Black queer women.

The 83-minute-long film follows the story of a young Black Brooklyn teenager, Alike (Adepero Oduye), who has embraced her sexuality as a lesbian but battles to confide in her parents. Rated R.

### "The Unabridged Mrs. Vera's Daybook"

Saturday, June 8, 2-3:30 p.m., Downtown Library (343 S. 5th Ave.)

Experience a story of love, art and activism in the work of San Francisco artists David Faulk and Michael Johnstone. "The Unabridged Mrs. Vera's Daybook" follows how long-term AIDS survivors Faulk and Johnstone bring love and joy to a broken community during one of the darkest periods in U.S. history. The film is vivid and poignant — a piece of art. Rated PG.

Jadein Black. Photo: jadeinblack.com

### "But I'm a Cheerleader"

Tuesday, June 11, 6-7:30 p.m., Downtown Library (343 S 5th Ave.)

Rewatch camp classic "But I'm a Cheerleader," a satire on conversion therapy. The film stars "Orange Is the New Black" star Natasha Lyonne as Megan as well as RuPaul playing the unconvincingly closeted Mike. The film follows Megan's journey through conversion therapy, which ends up backfiring hilariously. Rated R.

## Other Events

### Drag King Revue

Saturday, June 29, 6-7:30 p.m., Downtown Library (343 S. 5th Ave.), 4th Floor Meeting Room

A huge hit when the library introduced the event last year, the Drag King Revue is back for a second year. Enjoy an exciting night of drag performances inspired by the book "The Last Night at The Telegraph Club." Retyi, the Ann Arbor District Library communications and marketing manager, reveals that guests will be treated to a panel discussion afterward "that talks about the artform, what drag king culture is and the other side of the drag king-drag queen conversation."

### Drag Bingo

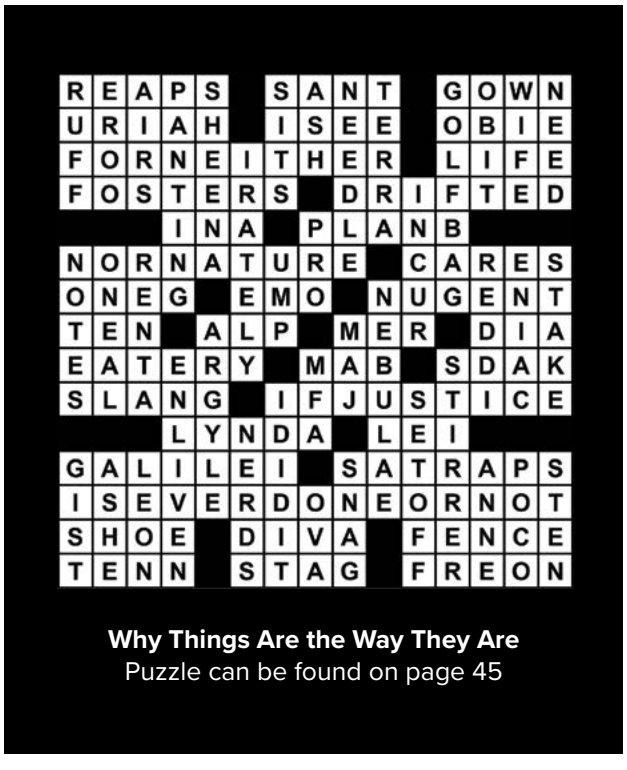
Sunday, June 23, 3-4 p.m., Downtown Library (343 S. 5th Ave.), 4th Floor Meeting Room

Another beloved event hosted by the Ann Arbor District Library is drag bingo. This exciting event has long been a favorite — this year it will be led by local queen Jadein Black. Enjoy an afternoon of music, fun prizes and lots of laughter.

### Queer Horror Cinema Presentation

Friday, June 14, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Pittsfield Branch (2359 Oak Valley Dr.)

Film buffs, this one's for you. Dr. Sean M. Donovan, a scholar of LGBTQ+ media studies and former professor at the University of Michigan and curator of queer experimental cinema for the Ann Arbor Film Festival, will join this year's event with a presentation on the intersections of horror films and queerness.




**Why Things Are the Way They Are**
Puzzle can be found on page 45

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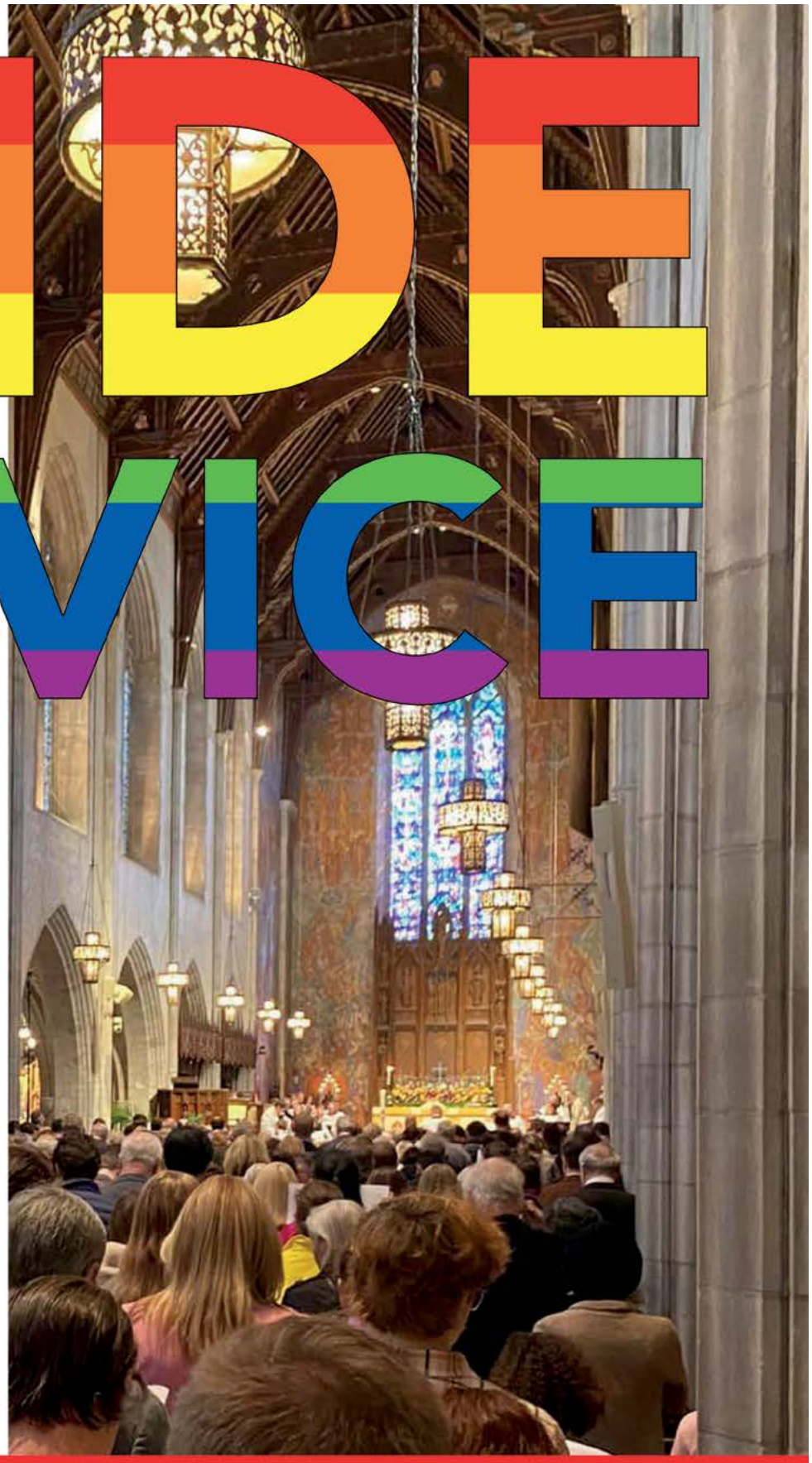

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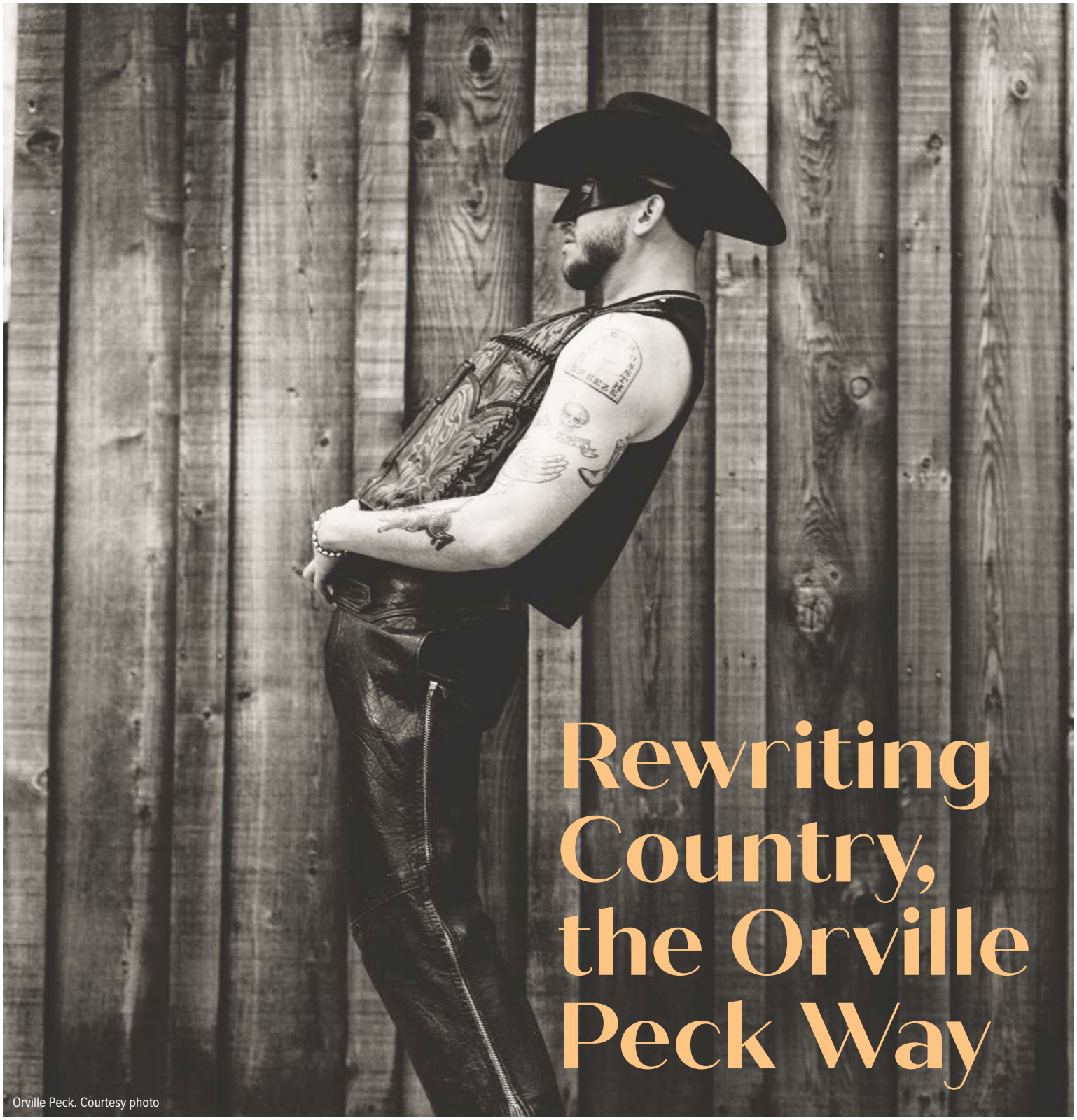


Orville Peck. Courtesy photo

# Rewriting Country, the Orville Peck Way

## Masked musician on helping to bring the genre back to its muticultural roots

**BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI**

Orville Peck's sexy video for "Cowboys Are Frequently Secretly Fond of Each Other" is unabashedly queer in ways the country music genre hasn't historically seen. In it, Peck sings his cover of Latin country musician Ned Sublette's 1981 song as a collaboration with Willie Nelson — who, inspired by "Brokeback Mountain," performed a solo version of the song in 2006 — but now, especially, Peck's modern take feels like a very welcome subversion of what we've come to know as country music. Man hands graze man butts. Women slow dance intimately with other women. Twinks in tight blue jeans bale hay. In other words, this saloon is serving more than beer.

Ever the ally, it was actually Nelson's idea to revisit the song with Peck, who just released the tune as part of "Stampede Vol. 1," his first duets album. The seven-song collection also features a collaboration with Elton John on "Saturday Night's Alright (For Fighting)" and "Chemical Sunset" with fellow queer Americana singer-songwriter Allison Russell. "I wouldn't say it's as traditionally in line with the rest of my albums," he tells me. "I would say it's more conceptual just based on the collaborative nature of it."

Openly and unapologetically gay, Peck released his first album in 2019, the self-produced "Pony." Since then, he has steadily risen to prominence as one of the few modern trailblazing artists redefining country music — challenging the old notion that only straight, white people can strum a guitar and sing with a backwoods twang.

He'll bring both, along with his ubiquitous cowboy boots, on the road for his aptly titled "Stampede" headlining summer tour, including stops June 4 at Meadow Brook Amphitheatre in Rochester Hills and June 5 at Frederik Meijer Gardens Amphitheater in Grand Rapids.

Before setting off on tour, I spoke with Peck about why he's letting more of his face peak out of his signature face mask, what other allies can learn from Willie Nelson and the "beautiful gift" of inspiring kids in rural communities to be themselves.

**As a longtime country fan, I feel like I've been manifesting you in various ways since I was a kid who grew up on this music. During interviews with country superstars like Dolly and Reba who I've interviewed over the years, I've even asked them, as if they had the answer: "Why can't we have an out gay male country artist?" And here you are. What does it feel like to know that you are what so many LGBTQ+ country fans have been manifesting and hoping for for decades?**

Wow, that's so lovely. Thank you. That means a lot to me. It doesn't escape me because I was also one of those fans. I, like a ton of queer people, grew up loving country music and relating to all sorts of country, both male and female, usually especially females, to be honest. So it feels amazing because I am also one of those fans that grew up loving country and longed to see someone like me or someone sort of like me, even close to like me, making the music that I love.

So getting to do this song with Willie: I can't understate how important and full circle it is for just me as a person to know that Willie Nelson is on this

track doing this song with me. It's really affirming and really validating for me and I imagine a lot of people, which is cool. But it's funny because I always say country music appeals to gay and queer people because it's about storytelling, yearning, loss and unrequited love. All the classic country songs I can think of, I always say they feel like the queer experience to me. It doesn't surprise me whatsoever that queer people are drawn to country music.

**And then, of course, you mix in the campy flamboyance of someone like Dolly.**

Exactly. Put rhinestones on it and it's like, fuck, it's over.

**And speaking of your collaboration with Willie — it's also such a powerful nod to straight male allyship.**

Totally. This term "ally" gets used a lot these days. In the climate of the world right now, where queer people, trans people and drag queens are so villainized and under actual serious threats of violence to their lives, it's not good enough just to be accepting or friends with a gay person. I don't think that's enough. Real allyship in times like these [is] standing next to us with absolutely no ambiguity and essentially saying, "We are here right next to you and we support you." And that's exactly what Willie did by doing this video and song.

**What is the impact that you hope this collaboration has?**

I've always grown up with a lot of straight guys as my friends, because I used to skateboard and play in punk bands and all that stuff. All I had around me were straight boys. They were always just my buddies. And so I've seen that kind of allyship in my personal life since I was quite young, which is fantastic. But I've also seen this sort of performative allyship where it's like, "People should be accepting of everyone." That isn't allyship. Allyship is being vocally in support and standing next to us, especially in a time like now, when we need it so much.

**Given that we've only recently seen more openly LGBTQ+ artists in country music, who gave you the courage to step up and decide to make a place for yourself within the genre?**

I really attribute that to my parents and my family. I never really had to come out because I think my parents always sort of knew. I have two older brothers who are both straight, and I think my parents always knew that I had a little sugar in my tank. They always made a really adamant effort to let me know that I was no different than anybody and that I could do whatever I wanted to do and I can be whoever I wanted to be. Because I think that they knew and could see that that was something that was not encouraged in a lot of queer kids. I was really incredibly fortunate to just have parents that wanted to encourage that side of me.

I also grew up with this ambition to just not let anybody tell me I can't do something for any reason. And so when someone excludes me, it makes me want to include myself even more and kick the door down and then sit at the table and put my feet up on the table. That was instilled in me so strongly as a kid by my parents. We grew up in South Africa during apartheid. I'm from a mixed-race family. I saw firsthand the treatment of people for being different. And I think my parents just really wanted to instill in us that nothing makes anybody less than someone else.

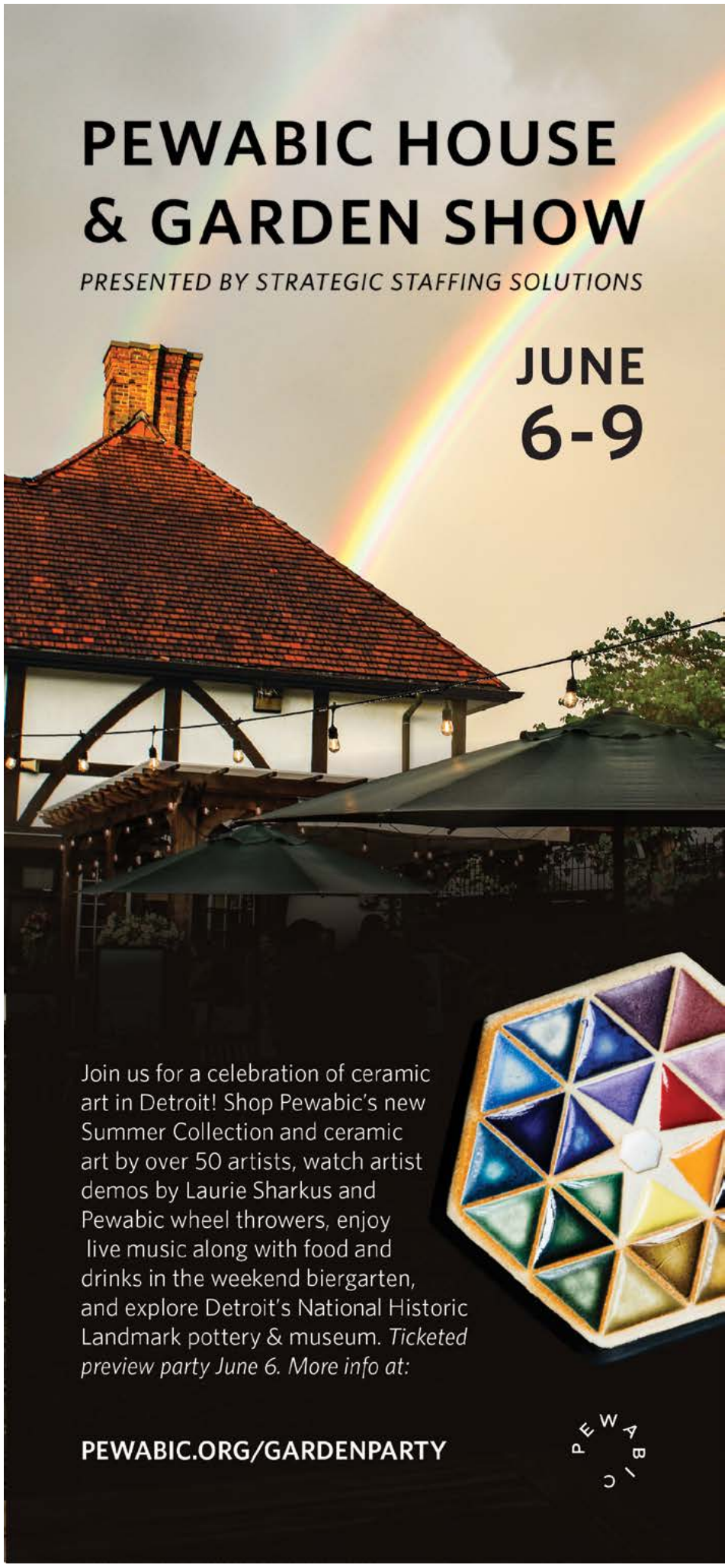
**It seems every decade or so, we go through a redefining of country music. Where do you think we're at now with the genre?**

I think we are at a place in the genre that's so exciting because there's sort of a reclaiming happening. Because the truth is anybody should feel welcome to be a part of country as a culture and as a genre because the fact is it's literally just built off of so many different inspirations and cultures to begin with. Country music, just in the instrumentation alone, is African, Hawaiian and European. It was built when America was in its early days of being this huge melting pot.

So I think what we're learning and realizing as a society now is, oh, wait, I don't have to be a white straight person that lives in the South in order to be a part of this culture. This can also be my culture, and I can make it my culture, and I can be a part of it. I think it's really cool that so many artists are claiming their place in it because it is truly the most diverse American genre, and it is for everybody. It should represent how diverse its roots are. It should be representative in how the genre looks today. And I think it's finally catching up.

**You've said the masks you wear as shields allow you to feel more comfortable to be vulnerable as an artist. Since we're seeing more of your face now, does that mean you're feeling a little safer to be more musically vulnerable these days?**

See **Orville Peck**, page 38



Continued from page 37

I do. I made the mask at a time for several reasons. I think it was partly something kind of artistic and bold that I wanted to do and wanted to see within country that I hadn't seen before. I wanted there to be like a David Bowie of country kind of vibe and make something artistic. And then I think it also inadvertently protected me and my anonymity and started to ease my transition into success because I'm not someone naturally built for that transition. I think I would've gone crazy if I didn't have that buffer. It was really helpful for me on a personal level. Also, yeah, I started to realize that it allowed me to be more vulnerable as an artist and share my stories. It just gave me a little bit of confidence.

But it's funny, with each album I've been building so much more confidence of my own, and the mask has felt less and less important to me, even though I will always be grateful to it and love it and love all the iterations of it. But I think in my personal and artistic journey to authenticity and the most vulnerability and the most openness, the mask has to represent that. As I evolve, I think that has to evolve as well.

**When you first decided that you were going to wear the mask, did you foresee a day in which the mask might become a topic of conversation on social media among very thirsty queer and gay men?**

[Laughs.] No. All I ever wanted to do was just make one album, which I did practically completely alone and with $300 in my pocket. So every single thing that's ever happened since I put out "Pony" has been sort of a surprise and a lovely cherry on top for me. So no, I've never envisioned most of the things that have happened in my career.

**For the tour, have you already started the process of deciding which masks you'll pack? Is that a torturous process?**

Yep. It's always a very specific discussion with my stylist. There's a new design, obviously, so it's an exciting time because we get to see what we come up with color-wise and to match all my different outfits. Just on styling in general, unfortunately, I've kind of screwed myself because we killed all my styling so early on because my stylist is so amazing, and so every single time I have to do something, we're like, "Fuck, how are we going to top what we've already done?" So there's a whole archival museum of all the outfits I've ever worn and we have to look at those and make sure we're not repeating anything. It's a whole process.

**Given that some of your shows are happening during Pride season, are you planning on doing anything special for Pride at these shows or is an Orville Peck show just basically a Pride festival?**

[Laughs.] Yes, exactly. It kind of goes both ways in the sense that I think my show is already filled with pride and a lot of queer joy. Whether it's a Pride show or not, I go up there and my main focus is just to be myself, to connect with the audience and to tell my stories.

**How did you arrive at the name "Stampede" for the tour and the album?**

Well, I always want to keep it horse-y with my album titles. There's a little bit of a theme in my album titles, obviously. Even since the last album, I was thinking, "Well, what could I call it that's still in keeping with my tradition with what I name my albums?" And then as I started to look at just all the different artists that are on this album, I was like, "I know exactly what this is. It's a stampede."

Orville Peck. Photo: Ben Prince

**My vote for "Stampede Vol. 2" is for a Dolly duet, and also one with k.d. lang.**

Oh, I love k.d. Some of the original queer country that a lot of people don't even really realize. She was a real trailblazer. "Trail of Broken Hearts" is an amazing song.

**Seeing you as part of the country music genre sends a positive message to queer kids who are living through a precarious time for LGBTQ+ people. What do you hope the message is for a young boy in rural America who dreams of being like you one day?**

That you already are loved and there are people out there that are not members of our community that will love you for exactly who you are. The coolest thing about it being Willie Nelson, not only is he one of my idols, but there isn't a single country music fan that doesn't like Willie Nelson. He's such an icon and such a legend, and so for him, more than all of these other people, to stand up and do this, I think it can give people a lot of comfort and reassurance that there are people out there that stand with us and are with us.

Something I never anticipated is, I guess, being an inspiration to, well, anyone, really. And so now that that has become the case, I take it really seriously, actually. It's been a really beautiful gift to me to be able to hear the stories from people of just their experiences and how my music maybe has affected them or encouraged them. It's kind of become the most beautiful and important part of my career — just feeling the impact that it has on people. So if that gets to be broadened and helps someone maybe in a situation where they feel they're excluded, that's everything to me. I think that's really important.

Continued from page 28

against anti-diversity. *facebook.com/HollandPride*

### Jackson Pride
**Horace Blackman Park. W. Michigan Ave. and S. Jackson St., 12–6 p.m.**
*mijacksonPrideorg/events*

### Monroe County Pride
**111 W. Elm Ave., Monroe, 12–6 p.m.**
*facebook.com/PRISMMonroeCounty*

### South Haven (Pride in the Park)
New Pride Event!

**Stanley Johnston Park. 202 Dyckman Ave., 12–10 p.m.**

South Haven will hold its first-ever Pride event in 2024 with a day packed with activities like TikTok Lip Sync Battles, a Wagon Float Pride Parade, a poetry slam, a talent show, stand-up comedy, drag performances and a prom dance, along with food and vendors.

southhaven.org/events/south-haven-pride

### Three Rivers Pride
**Downtown Three Rivers. 103 Portage Ave., 12–11 p.m.** *facebook.com/threeriverspride*

## Sunday, June 30

### Big Rapids Pride
**Downtown Big Rapids, 12–8 p.m.**
*pridebigrapids.org*

### Buchanan Pride on the Common
**Downtown Buchanan, 4-9 p.m.**

### Port Huron (Blue River Pride)
**701 McMorran Blvd., 10 a.m.–3 p.m.**
*bluewaterallies.com/event-details/blue-water-pride-1*

## JULY

## Sunday, July 14

### South Lyon Pride
**McHattie Park. 300 Dorothy St., 12–4 p.m.**
*facebook.com/SouthLyonPride*

## Thursday, July 20

### Battle Creek (Pride Weekend)
**Various events, July 18–21**

Parade kick-off: Michigan Ave. at Washington St., July 19, 7 p.m., ends at Commerce Point

Festival: Leila Aboretum (928 W. Michigan Ave.), 12–8 p.m. *battlecreekPrideorg/pride-weekend*

## Sunday, July 28

### Hotter Than July
**Various events, July 26-28**

### Hotter Than July Gospel & Soul Concert
**MotorCity Casino, July 28, 8 p.m.**

The signature summertime Pride event hosted by LGBT Detroit, North America's largest Black-founded and led LGBTQ+ non-profit, Hotter Than July is the world's longest-running,

See **2024 Pride Calendar**, page 46

# The Owners of Opal Grove Games Didn't Feel Welcome in Many Spaces.

# So They Made Their Own.

## Local LGBTQ+ gamers on why they frequent the cozy, welcoming store and gaming lounge

**BY LAYLA MCMURTRIE**

A gaming session at Opal Grove Games. Courtesy photo

The feeling of acceptance is intentional when you step into Detroit's Opal Grove Games, nostalgically nestled in the basement below 27th Letter Books. Walking down the stairs into the space, a Pride flag and a Black Lives Matter flag hang side by side, making it abundantly clear that all are welcome.

Opened by couple Ben Lippi and Aisha Blake, Opal Grove embodies a vision cultivated by the owners' personal experiences in the gamer community. Lippi, who is nonbinary and queer, and Blake, a Black woman, are driven by a shared mission to create a haven for Black and LGBTQ+ gamers where everyone feels comfortable, included and uplifted.

"A big part of why we opened the store in the first place was that we didn't feel like there was a place where we could have a real gaming community that was welcoming of anyone," Blake says. "In particular, I had plenty of experiences where I'd go to a hobby shop with Ben, and I'd get ignored or people would be rude. And I'm like, this isn't where I want to spend my money, let alone spend a large portion of my time. So, we really wanted to create that space for ourselves and our friends and hopefully be able to reach out to people who just might not have felt welcome in the hobby at all."

She adds, "Speaking as a Black person who has lived in Detroit for a long time, there is, at least for me, a certain comfort in walking into a Black space, and I personally have never had a gaming community that was a Black space. The idea is to make a space where Black people can be happy and have fun. I think that everybody should have that, and if that means that we have to make it, then fine, great."

Since its opening in October 2022, Opal Grove has attracted customers through word of mouth and pop-up events in the city. When customers come in, they can choose to access the shop's extensive rental library for $3.50 an hour or purchase games to take home.

"I make it a point whenever I meet anyone who seems like they are interested in games, and especially if they are Black, queer, to say, 'Hey, we have this, this is available,'" Blake says. "As people come and they feel safe, they start bringing their first dates to the store and they bring their friends and their family, and so it's grown in that way."

At first, Opal Grove didn't hold specified game nights as they thought, "We're a game store, every day is game night." But the owners quickly realized from conversations with customers that people needed something more intentional, so now there are community game nights every week.

Opal Grove has recently starting offering queer game nights. Through these events, people are able to get out of their comfort zone and make friends with other local gamers. The mission behind queer game night is to create "a space where there can be joy and companionship without necessarily pain as well." So far, that vision has been beautifully realized.

"Our community members who have come from different fields and styles of gaming start meeting and start becoming friends," Lippi says.

"Now they're going out to dinner together before they come to the store," Blake adds.

Rhys Agombar, who identifies as asexual and currently lives in Detroit, has attended both queer game nights and has been hanging out at Opal Grove for a couple of months.

"The community around the shop is phenomenal. After going there a couple of nights it felt like I just found a second family. I was welcomed into the game nights, and then when the queer games specifically came out, everyone was super welcoming, super supportive, but not prying at all," Agombar says. "I've already made some really good friends there that I've been in contact with a lot, Nick and Dez, as well as just the owners, Ben and Aisha. Absolutely great people."

Hallie Gaylord, another queer gamer who identifies as trans, is a lifelong resident of the Detroit area and attended Opal Grove's inaugural queer game night. She says there are some game spaces she no longer frequents due to negative experiences, but that she feels consistently welcomed at Opal Grove.

"It's a place you can walk into and let your guard down," Gaylord says. "I can just sit, be myself, and enjoy the experience."

Lippi echoed a similar sentiment that some gaming spaces are not always the most welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community. "A lot of stores I've been in previously, I haven't always felt comfortable in or like I can be myself. Even though I read as pretty masc to a lot of folks, I still don't feel comfortable or like I always fit in," Lippi says. "A lot of places, there's a blatant hostility towards people who are outside a certain assumed demographic. So, for myself, who most of the time visibly appears to fit those demographics, I understand that it's much more intense for people who don't. So, we want to try and build a place where people don't feel like that, where they instead can be themselves and can feel welcome."

For many, gaming serves as an avenue for self-exploration, a sentiment oftentimes even more resonant within the LGBTQ+ community. Lippi says that they and many other gamers "absolutely" connect their queerness with their love for gaming.

A recent study from GLAAD revealed that 17% of active gamers identify as LGBTQ+, a number expected to rise. The research stated that "particularly for LGBTQ gamers, gaming can not only be an escape and a way to cope, but also an important outlet for self-

See **Opal Grove Games**, page 50

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# Prom of Pride: Celebrating Love in Every Color

**BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT**
**PHOTOS: STEVE KOSS**

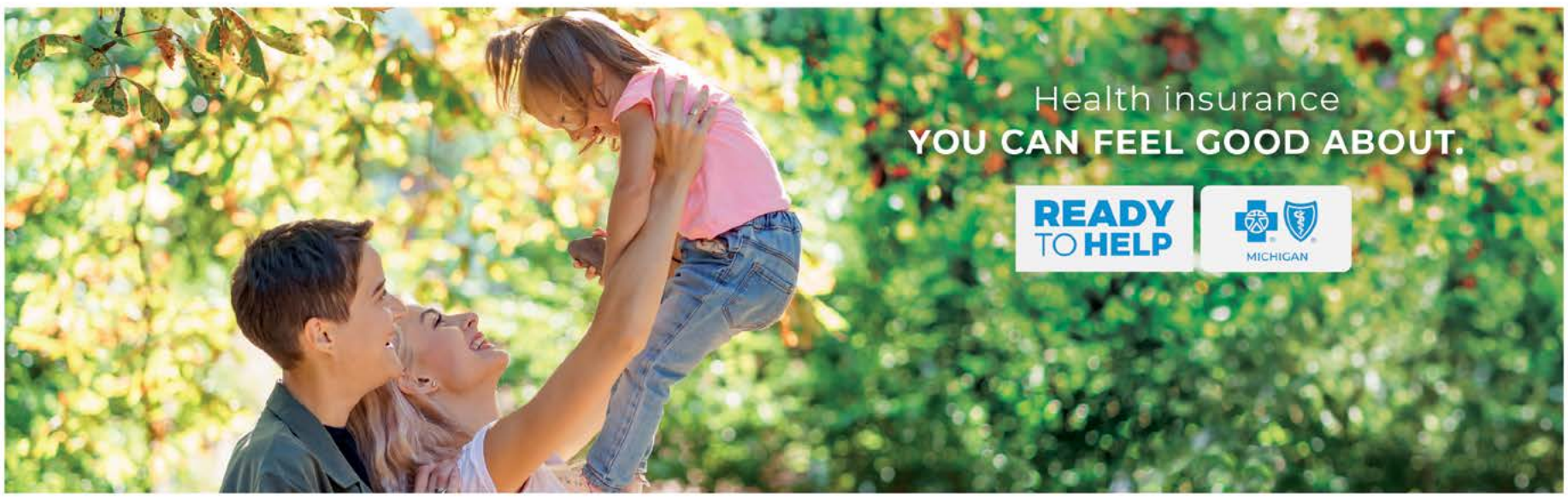
Affirmations, Ferndale's LGBTQ+ community center, welcomed guests to its annual Prom ReDeux on May 18. Promgoers relished the opportunity to get a prom "do-over" in a fully queer-affirming, loving space while dancing the night away and contributing to Affirmations' mission to enrich the lives of the local LGBTQ+ community in myriad ways.

Affirmations Marketing and Communications Manager Marisol Dorantes-Silva told BTL the event is her favorite of the year. "The focus is celebration, queer joy and community," she said. "We are intentional about the event feeling like a party that centers our guests. That means no program nor speakers." Dorantes-Silva said the event included food, drinks, DJs, a tarot reader, selfie stations, a photobooth and a caricaturist, activities selected to help attendees capture and create memories with "the people who make us feel safe and loved enough to be our full selves."

The main highlight of the event for Dorantes-Silva, though, is guest feedback. "Listening to people speak about how the event gives them the opportunity to heal from past experiences is a beautiful reminder of how much Prom ReDeux matters," she said.

Affirmations Board of Directors Co-Chair Demetrike Wells-O'Brien posted about the event on Facebook. "Fear, insecurity and uncertainty prevented me from going to my high school prom," he wrote. "Last night, thanks to Affirmations, I was able to finally experience something I never thought would be possible — my first PROM!"

"Even now, as a board member, this amazing organization is still serving as a resource and safe space for people like me to live our dreams as our truest most authentic selves," the post continued. "It was so much fun, and I am incredibly appreciative to the staff and volunteers who made this night possible. Special shoutout to my incredibly handsome husband and prom date Patrick! There is no one else in the world I would have rather have had this moment with than you. I love you!"

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Wreckno
Continued from page 7

says. “I did a lot of work in a straight scene, electronic music, but I always wanted to be accepted in the queer scene — I just wanted to be able to play Prides. I wanted to be able to be at places that were for queer Pride and it’s just another amazing part of my life. That’s just a blessing, and it means so much to me.”

Besides starting the month in Ferndale, Wreckno will be performing at New Orleans Pride and Denver Pride this summer, among many other festivals. The hometown show specifically, though, is a full-circle moment for the artist.

“I always loved Ferndale, that was like one of the first places I ever was in a city where there was clearly rainbows. It’s just like, you go down the main street, you just kind of know that this is the queer part of town,” Wreckno says. “For me, I remember going there when I was like 19 and being like, ‘Whoa, we don’t have this anywhere where I’m from.’”

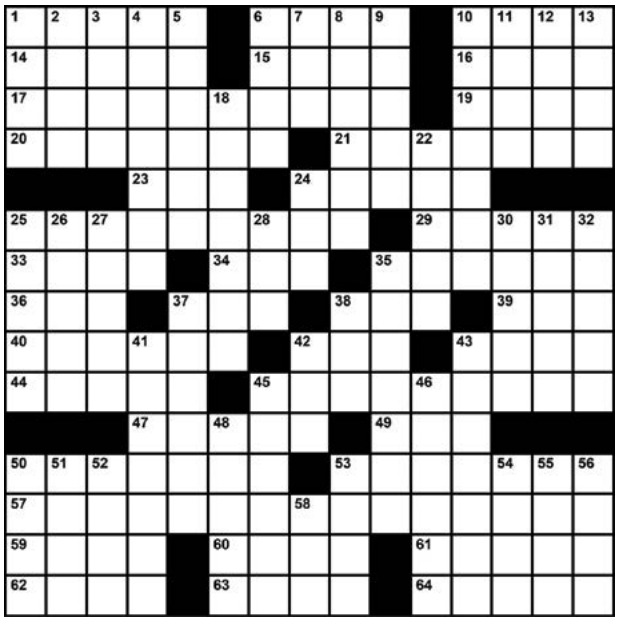
Other than Pride performances, Wreckno’s big goal right now is to release their upcoming “Party Girl” EP, a project that represents Wreckno’s expansive artistry.

“It’s the first record deal I ever worked on. It’s the first time I’ve ever gone to LA to work with new producers, new writers, and just really kind of having this pop star fantasy that I’ve always dreamt of,” Wreckno says. “It’s kind of a final conglomeration of all the things we’ve worked toward and I’m super stoked for it.”

Though the lead single and title track for “Party Girl” will be released alongside a music video on June 7, Ferndale Pridegoers will get a first listen. When their empowered choreo lands dramatically on that stage, Wreckno hopes to see a sea of people being “their most authentic selves.”

“I hope they feel comfortable in their own skin, safe to express themselves, to dance without judgment or worry or fear of other people judging them,” Wreckno says. “Just expect a pussy-popping good time.”

Wreckno. Photo: Colin Patrick



# Why Things Are the Way They Are

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14 Heep of fiction
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16 "Jeffrey" won one
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52 Politico Panetta
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54 Vampire novelist Rice
55 Somewhat, in music
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58 Breeder need

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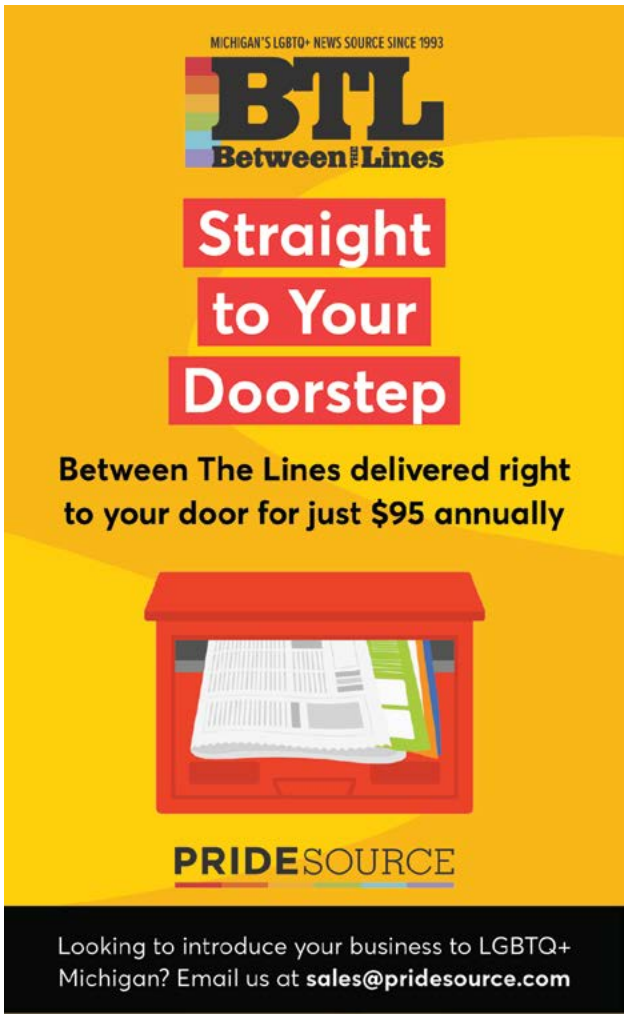

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‹ 2024 Pride Calendar
Continued from page 39

uninterrupted Black Pride celebration. The three-day event features a candlelight vigil honoring the lives of queer community members, a worship service, health screenings and a feature musical event. In celebration of the organization's 30th anniversary, LGBT Detroit will offer the Hotter Than July Gospel & Soul Concert featuring Grammy-nominated artist B. Slade. *lgbtdetroit.org/hotterthanjuly*

Transgender Michigan will hold its 25th annual Transgender Pride in the Park in 2024. The bring-your-own picnic features speakers and a vendor area with organizations and businesses serving the trans community and a corresponding virtual vendor mall. *transgendermichigan.org/transgender-pride*

## AUGUST

### Saturday, Aug. 3

**Ann Arbor Pride**
**Liberty and Main Streets, 12 p.m.**
*facebook.com/AnnArborPride*

### Saturday, Aug. 24

**Transgender Pride in the Park**
**Martin Road Park. 1900 Orchard Ave., Ferndale, 12–6 p.m.**

## SEPTEMBER

### Thursday, Sept. 19

**Mackinac Island Pride Through Sept 22**
**Mackinac Island,** details TBA, events run 2 p.m. Sept. 19 through 3 p.m. Sept. 22. *straitspride.org*

### Saturday, Sept. 28

**Up North Pride (Traverse City). - Various events Sept. 26-29**
Visibility Rally & March: F and M Park (716 E. State St.), 4-6 p.m. *upnorthPride.com*

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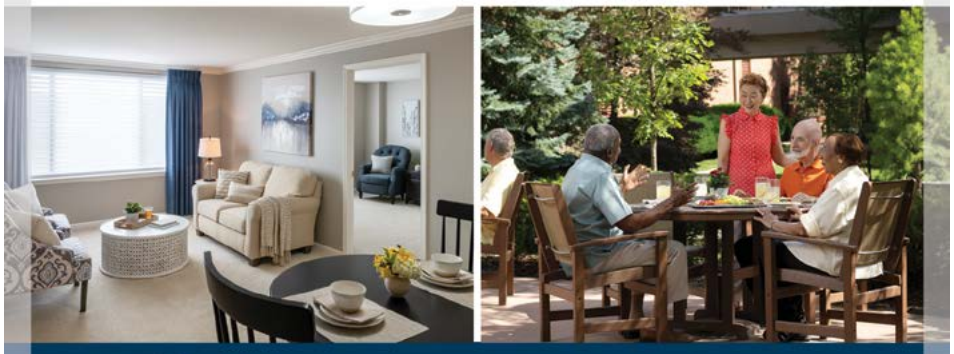

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◂ **Tiff Massey**
Continued from page 33

Detroit, you understand that you don't want anybody to have the same outfit on as you when you go out to church or to a concert, or just stepping outside," she says. "This work focuses on how Black people, specifically, adorn themselves. And it's why I named the exhibit '7 Mile + Livernois.'"

In 2011, Massey became the first Black woman to earn a Master of Fine Arts in metalsmithing from the prestigious Cranbrook Academy of Art. Soon, the global art world was taking notice, and Massey started racking up accolades and earning awards like the 2015 Kresge Arts in Detroit Fellowship, two John S. and James L. Knight Foundation awards, and the 2019 Art Jewelry Forum's Susan Beech Mid-Career Artist Grant. She's held artist residences in Detroit, Greece and France, and her work has been exhibited widely across the U.S. and throughout the world.

"7 Mile + Livernois" spans four galleries in the DIA's contemporary wing, which have been deinstalled as the museum embarks on a restructuring of its contemporary art collection. "This provided a unique opportunity for an artist to respond to the space and collection," Pfohl notes. "Tiff's work will be on view while we finalize our plans for our new contemporary wing. We also see the show as a conversation that will unfold over time, through programming and education, and we wanted to be sure that the youth we serve through our education programs, especially school groups, had ample time to see the exhibition."

When Massey isn't working on her art, she's often putting in hours as a commercial real estate developer, turning forgotten buildings into places that nurture the soul of the local community. A new community art center project focuses on a large building in the Avenue of Fashion district that Massey is transforming into a "white box" space she hopes will become home to art projects, including large-scale artworks like the ones she creates, and as a community gathering space for unique events.

"It's a very interesting experience to hear the comments of people living near the site," she says. "People who thought they would never see anything like this in the neighborhood. To me, this development is part of my art practice, too."

"Whatupdoe," 2014, stainless steel. Collection of the artist

Massey observes that while Detroit is the first American UNESCO City of Design (a designation that recognizes a city's design legacy and commitment to promoting cultural and creative industries), local developers often focus on rehab projects using the cheapest materials available and on speed versus putting thought and intentionality into the work. "There's not a lot of investment into what we're actually adding to the landscape," she says. "There was so much money and investment poured into the history of the city of Detroit, and to see the juxtaposition of that — that none of these [new] structures are really gonna hold up like some of the historic structures. I want to see what can be added of value, outside of just recycling a building, essentially."

Massey hopes to have the space rolling by September, Detroit's "Month of Design." In the meantime, she's focused on her DIA show, which will stay on exhibit for a full year, through May 11, 2025. Ahead of the opening, Massey said she was "excited about the show," which "invites us all to celebrate our collective identity, ancestral flyness and beauty," according to DIA press materials.

"This is the most ambitious exhibition that I've had to date and yeah, I want people to just come out," she says. "I work very, very hard, and I just want to share what I've been doing, what I've been planning for over a year."

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https://zlc-aa.org

## BATTLE CREEK

**Trinity Lutheran Church**
2055 Columbia Ave. E.
www.tlcbattlecreek.org

## BURTON

**Our Risen Lord Lutheran Church**
4040 Lapeer Rd.
www.ourrisenlordelca.com

## DUNDEE

**St. John Lutheran Church**
460 Riley St.
www.stjohnsondundee.wordpress.com

## EAST LANSING

**University Lutheran Church**
1020 S. Harrison Rd.
www.ulcel.org

**St. Paul Lutheran Church**
3383 E. Lake Lansing Rd.
www.stpaul-el.org

## FARMINGTON HILLS

**Hope Lutheran Church**
39200 West Twelve Mile Rd.
www.hope-lutheran-church.com

## FERNDALE

**Zion Lutheran Church**
143 Albany St.
www.zionlutheranmi.org

## FREELAND

**Zion Lutheran Church**
545 7th St.
www.zionfreeland.org

## GRAND RAPIDS

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church**
250 Commerce Ave. SW
www.bethlehemchurchgr.org

## KALAMAZOO

**Lutheran Church of the Savior**
3616 East G Avenue
www.lcoskzoo.com

## KENTWOOD

**Ascension Lutheran Church**
4252 Breton Rd. SE
www.twochurches.org

## MONROE

**Christ Lutheran Church**
225 E. Elm Ave.
www.christmonroe.weebly.com

## MOUNT PLEASANT

**Immanuel Lutheran Church**
320 South Bradley St.
www.immanuelmp.com

## OKEMOS

**Faith Lutheran Church**
4515 Dobie Rd.
www.faithlutheranokemos.org

## PORT HURON

**St. Martin Lutheran Church**
805 Chestnut St.
www.stmartinlutheran.net

## ROCHESTER HILLS

**Abiding Presence Lutheran Church**
1550 Walton Rd.
www.AbidingPresence.org

## SAGINAW

**Our Saviour Lutheran Church**
2525 Hemmeter Rd.
www.oursavioursaginaw.org

## SAINT JOSEPH

**Saron Lutheran Church**
510 Main St
www.saronlutheran.org

## SALINE

**Holy Faith Church**
6299 Saline-Ann Arbor Rd.
www.holy-faith-church.org

## TOLEDO, OHIO

**St. Lucas Lutheran Church**
745 Walbridge Ave.
www.stlucastoledo.org

## TRENTON

**St. Philip Lutheran Church**
1790 Fort St.
www.stphilipelca.com

## WATERFORD

**Christ Lutheran Church**
5987 Williams Lake Rd.
www.christwaterford.org

Opal Grove Games
Continued from page 40

expression."

Role-playing games, in particular, allow players to create characters based on different genders and sexual orientations, whether intentionally or not.

"You can put whatever qualities, personality qualities and other qualities on that character that you want," Gaylord says. "I definitely was able to explore some of those things through those kinds of character-building experiences."

Within these fantasy realms, individuals find a safe space to have complete control over navigating various aspects of their identities, fostering a sense of community and acceptance within the gaming world.

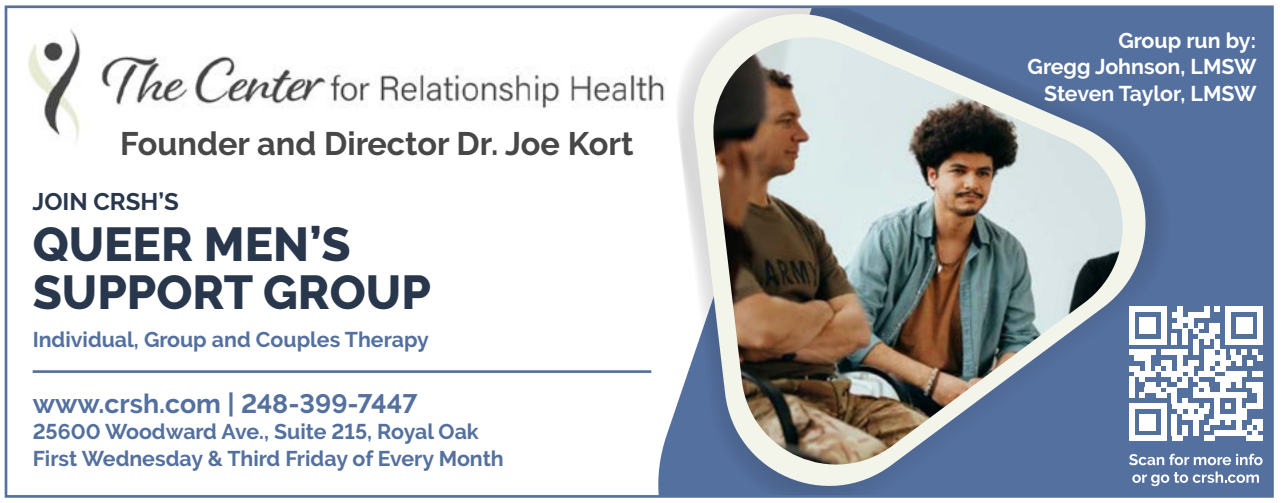
"I've met a ton of trans or gay or bi folks who have first discovered that about themselves after they built a character who was whatever queer identity relevant to them, and then after enough time playing as that character, they're like, 'Ohhhh,'" Lippi says. "So, when I was questioning my own identity, I'm like, 'I'm just gonna do it on purpose and I'm gonna see how it feels.' That was a very effective way for me to just try out non-binary identity and pronouns and get some real quick answers that I was struggling with."

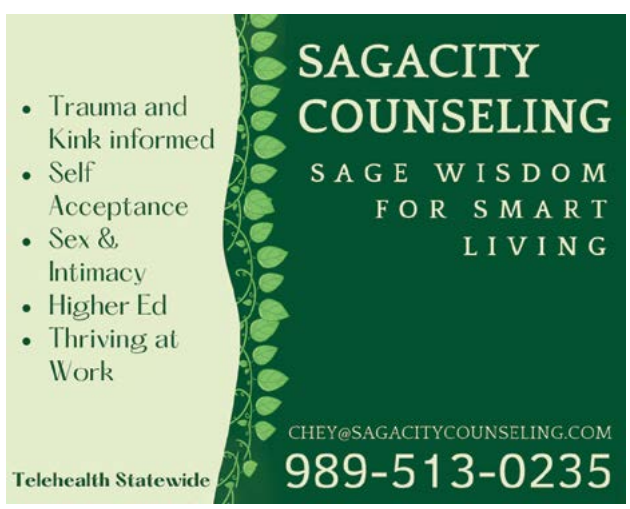
Another way Opal Groves shows its commitment to inclusivity for all is by teaching customers unfamiliar with certain games how to play, as learning and reading the rules can be overwhelming for some.

"A lot of people will feel intimidated and underestimate their own ability to play and enjoy games," Lippi says. "Games have a language, and so the more you play them, the easier they are to pick up. When you start and you play more, it gets better and easier, so part of our job is to help folks who haven't had as much exposure or experience and we can help sort of translate for them… so that they can get going, get into it and have fun."

The customers' feelings surrounding the space prove that the owners are successful in their goal of being welcoming while cultivating a space where all can find a home away from home.

"I think Ben and Aisha have done a really good job of creating just an overall general friendly space where everyone can be themselves and everyone is just here for the fun of it and is happy to be there with other people," Agombar says. "You meet so many different people with so many different stories and so many different interesting things to talk about and everyone is all just united by this shared, welcoming community space and also the love of the games that we're playing. That store and that community is really something special."





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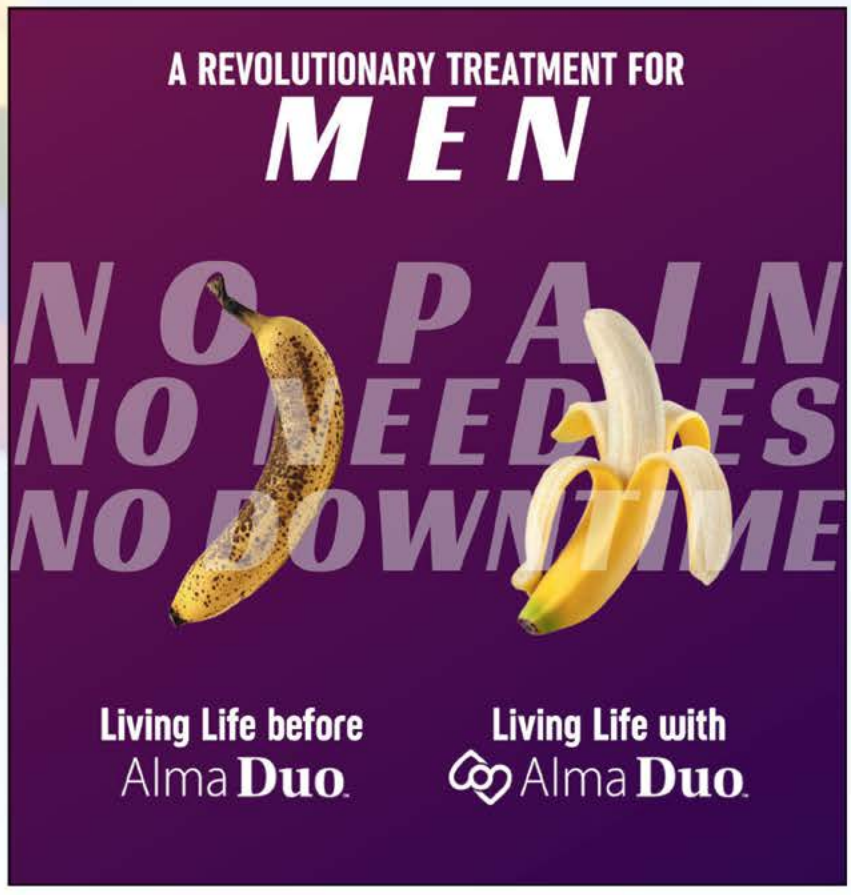


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HOSTED BY BENTLEY JAMES

| | |
|---|---|
| 12:30 | Opening Ceremony |
| 1:00 | Acoustic Ash |
| 2:00 | Inner Circle Avenue |
| 3:00 | Magic Soulful |
| 4:00 | Lipstick Jodi |
| 5:00 | Tifani VanDenBerg |
| 6:00 | New Comers Drag Show |
| 6:45 | Motor City Drag Kings Presents Ferndale Drag Extravaganza |

Motor City Casino Hotel PROUDLY PRESENTS

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:00 | WRECKNO ★ |
| 9:00 | Alise King |

## THE WOODWARD DANCE STAGE

| | |
|---|---|
| 1:00 | DJ ClubKid |
| 2:00 | Werkout Plan |
| 3:00 | ASTROMANN |
| 4:00 | DJ PP Girlfriend |
| 5:00 | Phys. Ed |
| 6:00 | DJ Kass |
| 7:00 | Kindle |
| 8:00 | DJ Holographic ★ |

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